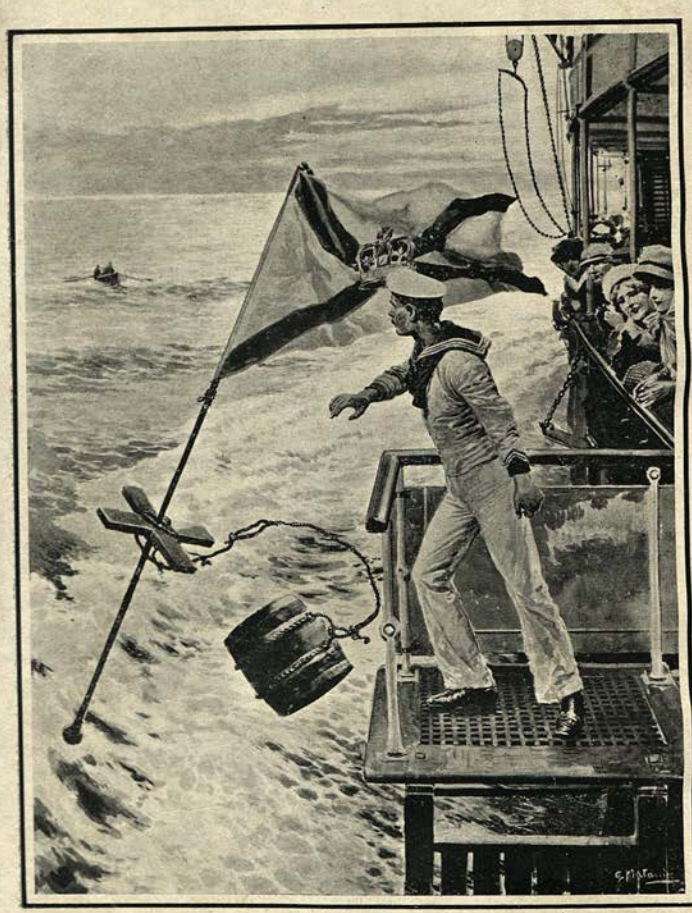

00099131

NOT TO BE ISSUED
OUT OF THE LIBRARY.

THE
ASIATIC SOCIETY OF BOMBAY
Town Hall, Bombay.

00099131

Digitized with financial assistance from
Shri Brihad Bhartiya Samaj
on 20 February, 2020



HEAVING OVERBOARD THE MAILS.

Fernando Noronha is a little island in the South Atlantic Ocean, and when a vessel does not call there the letters are enclosed in a cask, to which a flag is attached; this is cast into the sea and there left floating until a boat from the island picks it up. The island is sighted by perhaps more ships and visited by fewer than any other spot on the globe.

B25

By Edward Bennett

THE POST OFFICE & ITS STORY

99131
ae

NN U50

A

1912

99131

99131

AUTHOR'S NOTE

A GREAT deal has been written about the General Post Office in newspapers and magazines, but the books on the subject are comparatively few. And these volumes are either exhaustive historical treatises, such as Mr. Herbert Joyce's *History of the Post Office*, or more popularly written descriptions of Post Office life and work of the character of Lewin's *His Majesty's Mails* or J. W. Heyde's *Royal Mail*. Mr. Joyce's work, however, carries us no farther than the eve of penny postage, while the other books were written too long ago to be a guide to the Post Office of to-day. It is within the last twenty years that the Department has made the most rapid strides in the extension of its activities, and it is this period especially which is without an historian.

What I have attempted to do is to tell the story of the Department, briefly in its early beginnings, more fully in its modern developments, and in such a way as to give the reader the impression that the Post Office is alive, that it is in close touch with the needs of the nation, and is in less danger of being strangled with red-tape methods than at any time of its existence.

A book on the Post Office written for the student should contain abundant references to authorities and exhaustive tables of figures and estimates, but in the interest of the general reader I have omitted these aids to reflection. Mark Twain, when he published one

of his novels, said he had omitted all descriptions of scenery in the story, but those who liked that sort of thing would find it in the appendix. I have dispensed even with an appendix, and those who really want figures and estimates must be referred to the Postmaster-General's Annual Reports.

Of course I am largely indebted to the volumes I have mentioned and to others for the historical portions of my book. To Sir Rowland Hill's Life, written by his daughter, I owe many of the facts contained in my chapter on "The Penny Post."

The staff of the General Post Office have during the last twenty-one years conducted a magazine entitled *St. Martin's le Grand*, the volumes of which have been of great assistance to me, as they will be in the future to a more serious historian of the Post Office than I can claim to be. Among the writers to this magazine whose contributions I have found of great use are A. M. Ogilvie, J. A. J. Housden, C. H. Denver, R. C. Tombs, I.S.O., and R. W. Johnston. Mr. Johnston, who had held during a long life several important posts in the Department, took a keen interest in this book in its early stages, but, to my great regret, died before it was completed. Articles by J. G. Hendry and W. C. Waller helped me considerably in my chapter on "The Travelling Post Office." Mr. E. Wells and Mr. A. Davey gave me their kind help on the subject of "Motor Mails" and "The Parcel Post," and to my friend Mr. A. W. Edwards I am indebted for most valuable assistance in the writing of my chapters on "The Telegraph." I have also to thank another friend, Mr. R. W. Hatswell, for advice and help in many directions.

My acknowledgments are due to Messrs Jarrold and Sons of Norwich and Warwick Lane, E.C., for their

Author's Note

kind permission to include a schoolboy's essay on the postman in my chapter dealing with that official. The essay is to be found in a book entitled *The Comic Side of School Life*, by H. J. Barker.

The Post Office has many critics, friendly and unfriendly, but it count sits friends in millions, and I have written this book with the belief that a closer knowledge of the Department with which we all have dealings will be acceptable.

EDWARD BENNETT.

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	Postboys and Mail Coaches	17
II.	The Penny Post	31
III.	Lombard Street and St. Martin's le Grand	43
IV.	King Edward's Building	56
V.	The Travelling Post Office	69
VI.	The Parcel Post	83
VII.	Motor Mails	98
VIII.	The Undelivered Postal Packet	108
IX.	Money Orders and Postal Orders	125
X.	The Post Office Savings Bank	137
XI.	The Telegraph	155
XII.	The Telegraph (*continued*)	170
XIII.	The Telephone	181
XIV.	Engineers, Stores and Factories	195
XV.	Ocean Mails	208
XVI.	The Postal Union	222
XVII.	Concerning Foreign Post Offices	231
XVIII.	The Post Offices of the Empire	246
XIX.	The Postmaster-General and the Permanent Staff	261

Contents

CHAP.		PAGE
XX.	The Head Postmaster	276
XXI.	The Village Post Office	289
XXII.	The Postman	304
XXIII.	The Post Office Guide	317
XXIV.	Old Age Pensions and other Activities of the Post Office	332
	Index	350

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Heaving Overboard the Mails	*Frontispiece*
	PAGE
The Mail Coaches Leaving London	20
Mail Coach and Train	34
St. Martin's le Grand	48
The Blind Section	62
The Travelling Post Office—	
Interior	70
Suspending the Pouch	76
Pouch and Net	76
Pouch taken	76
Apparatus for Receiving Pouch	78
Apparatus for Delivering Pouch	78
The Parcel Post Hospital	94
The Custom House Officers at Work	96
The Sorting Office	110
A Postcard	114
A Postcard	120
A London Postman (Old Style)	126
The Woodpecker and the Telegraph Post	156
Telegrams on Telephone Wires	172
The Telephone Detective	182
Three Minutes' Conversation by Telephone	192

List of Illustrations

	PAGE
Underground Telephone Wires	198
How Treasure was Brought to London	210
St. Kilda Mail	219
The Postal Union Monument	228
A Post Office Stone	255
The River Postman	258
The Sorting School	280
The Postman's Bell	306
A Country Postwoman	314
A Nest in a Letter-box	328

THE POST OFFICE & ITS STORY

CHAPTER I

POSTBOYS AND MAIL COACHES

A SCHOOLBOY who was given the task of writing an essay on the Post Office used these words: "The Post Office contains the whole world's circumstances, or welfare, day after day, as a mother shuts all her chickens under her wings. A man would not reveal his very secreate words to his wife or to any one, but he trusts them to a weak envelope in the Post Office." This boy was perhaps wiser than he knew. For there is no institution existing in the country which comes so near to the hearts and homes of the British people as the General Post Office. Created primarily for the despatch and delivery of letters, it has developed into a vast organisation which is at once the carrier of the people's correspondence and parcels, the people's bank, and the agency by which all communications by telegraph and telephone are conducted. To tell the story of that organisation, how from the smallest beginnings in the Middle Ages it developed into the Post Office of the present day, would be a delightful task, but my intention is rather to relate its modern triumphs and to deal

with its history so far as it helps us to understand the position of things to-day.

It is usual, in telling the story of the Post Office, to go as far back as Greek, Roman, and Jewish times. In almost every book and article on the subject we are reminded that Ahasuerus sent letters into all provinces concerning his wife Vashti, and that Queen Jezebel has at least one urbane action to her credit in that she despatched the first recorded circular letter. Then we are reminded that Cicero and Pliny were accomplished correspondents, and that St. Paul wrote letters which have had a wide circulation. But these instances usually belong to the history of letter-writing and have little relation to our subject. It is obvious that so soon as letters began to be written in any nation they must have been despatched by some means or other to the persons for whom the communications were intended. Ancient history has many instances of posts specially created for the delivery of perhaps only one letter. The story of the Post Office can only properly begin at the time when the first efforts were made to systematise what was already a prevailing habit of the people.

The history of the British Post Office as a system can be divided into three periods. There was the age of the post-horses and postboys, extending from the time of the Tudors far into the eighteenth century. There was the age of the mail coaches, the romantic age of the General Post Office, full of stirring deeds and adventures. Indeed the title "His Majesty's Mails" would have accurately described the whole of the business transacted by the British Post Office during these centuries. Lastly there is the age in which we are living, the age of the mail train, which has produced a wide extension of the duties of the Department, and the despatch and delivery of letters is now only one of its activities.

Postboys and Mail Coaches

There is possibly another age in the near future of which we can already distinguish the dawn, that of the airship and aeroplane, but we are dealing in these pages with only accomplished facts.

There is little doubt that the first posts organised in this country were simply for the transmission of public despatches, and though from time to time attempts were made by private individuals to organise posts of their own, these efforts met with but little success, and in 1637 it was ordered by proclamation that no other messengers or foot posts were to carry letters except those employed by the King's Postmaster-General, unless to places untouched by the King's posts. This order marked the beginning of the monopoly which ever since has been in the hands of the Government.

The word "post" comes to us from the French; in early English records the carrier of the post is called a runner or a messenger. We assimilated the word under the Tudors, and the first man to be described as Master of the Posts was Brian Tuke, appointed by Henry VIII. in 1509. In this reign there was a service more or less regular between London and Berwick and between London and Calais. The Dover road is probably the oldest mail route in the kingdom. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries services were gradually extended to Scotland, Ireland, and the West of England.

The posts were slow and unreliable. The roads of this country were for several centuries in a wretched condition, and travelling was difficult and dangerous. The causeway or bridle-track ran down the middle of the road, while "the margin on either side was little better than a ditch, and being lower than the adjoining soil and at the same time soft and unmade, received and retained the sludge." The authorities

were chiefly concerned to preserve the causeway, for the mails were carried by runners or postboys on horseback. The maximum speed for the postboys allowed by the Master of the Posts was seven miles an hour: there was no authorised minimum, and the speed, including stoppages, rarely exceeded four miles an hour. Moreover the postboys were undisciplined and a source of infinite trouble to their employers. The postmaster on the other hand frequently considered that any horse was good enough to carry the mails, and the animals he supplied were a disgrace to the service. The temptations of the wayside inn often also explained the long delays. An official in the early part of the eighteenth century complained that "the gentry doe give much money to the riders whereby they be very subject to get in liquor which stops *the males.*"

The words, "Haste, Post, haste," have been found on the backs of private letters written at the close of the fifteenth century, and this was no formal endorsement but an urgent appeal to the lazy postboy to hurry up. "Ride, villain, ride,—for thy life—for thy life—for thy life," appeared also on letters with sketches of a skull and cross-bones or of a man hanging from a cross-bar. It was thought desirable to frighten the servant of the Government into the performance of his duties.

The towns on the route were bound to supply the horses for the King's posts. The postmasters in each town were the persons immediately responsible for this business, and it is interesting to know that one of the qualifications for the situation was the ability of the candidate to furnish a certificate under the hand and seal of the Bishop of the diocese that he was conformable to the discipline of the Church of England, and he was required to receive the Sacrament of the Lord's

Supper three months after admittance to office. The postmaster was frequently the innkeeper: he was the person best able to supply horses; and though his salary was small, the position was probably remunerative, as travellers were drawn to his house.

But we must not forget the foot posts in the old days, or runners as they are usually called. In the year 1715 there was not a single horse post in Scotland, all the mails being conveyed by runners on foot. Cross posts were frequently undertaken by runners, and the runners were not extravagantly paid for their services. A post-runner travelled from Inverness to Lochcarron—a distance, across country, of about fifty miles—making the journey once a week, for which he was paid five shillings. Naturally there was much difficulty with them, and they were continually at the mercy of highwaymen. Moreover, in spite of the penalty of capital punishment being visited on those who robbed his Majesty's mails, the postman himself was a frequent offender.

The difficulties of travelling in the seventeenth century are illustrated by the fact that in 1626 nearly £60 was spent in setting up wooden posts along the highway and causeway, near Bristol, for the guidance of travellers and runners. A Government running post then existed from London to Bristol. There is a spirited description in Cowper's *Task* of the arrival of the mail which would have been applicable during the whole of the postboy period :—

> "Hark, 'tis the twanging horn! O'er yonder bridge,
> That with its wearisome but needful length
> Bestrides the wintry flood, in which the moon
> Sees her unwrinkled face reflected bright,
> He comes the herald of a noisy world,
> With spattered boots, strapped waist and frozen locks,
> News from all nations lumbering at his back.

Postboys and Mail Coaches

True to his charge, the close packed load behind,
Yet careless what he brings, his one concern
Is to conduct it to the destined inn,
And having dropped the expected bag, pass on."

Such was the service with which our forefathers were more or less contented during the greater part of two centuries. At the end of the seventeenth century there were weekly posts to many parts of the country: there was a mail six days a week along the Kent road: at any place where the Court happened to be in residence a daily post was at once created, and during the season at Bath and Tunbridge Wells the visitors enjoyed the privilege of a daily despatch and delivery of letters.

It was not until late in the eighteenth century that any radical alteration in the system took place. For many years it had become a reproach against the Post Office that it had not kept pace with the travelling capacities and requirements of the time. What were called "Flying Coaches" had been established in the seventeenth century to many towns in the Kingdom, and while these conveyances were increasing in speed and comfort the Post Office was still satisfied with its four or five miles an hour. The slowness of the posts was in fact becoming intolerable to the people. The General Convention of the Royal Burghs of Scotland called the attention of the Postmasters-General to the slowness of the posts on the Great North Road. "Every common traveller," they wrote, "passed the King's mail on the first road in the kingdom," and complaints were made, generally by traders and professional men, that business was hampered by the backwardness of the Post Office.

To John Palmer, proprietor of the theatre at Bath, belongs the credit of the proposal to use the coach for

the carriage of the mails. He was remorseless in his description of the system he wished to abolish. The correspondence, he said, "was entrusted to some idle boy without character mounted on a worn-out hack, who so far from being able to defend himself against a robber, was more likely to be in league with one." Palmer's duties carried him into many parts of the country, and he thought letters should be conveyed at the same pace at which it was possible to travel in a chaise. He submitted his plan to Pitt, who was Prime Minister, and this statesman gave his warm approval to a trial of the scheme. On the 2nd August 1784 the first mail coach started from Bristol, and so successful was the experiment that in the following year there were coaches running to all parts of the Kingdom. Then ensued a period of great activity on the part of the General Post Office. There was competition with the private coaches, and year after year there were attempts to make records and to accelerate the mails.

The mail-coaching period extended a little over fifty years, and it marked as great an advance on the service of the past as the mail train has since shown compared with the mail coach. For instance, in 1715 the time allowed for the mail between London and Edinburgh was six days. Eighty years later a great advance had taken place. In 1798 Lord Campbell relates: "I was to perform the journey by mail coach to Edinburgh, and was supposed to travel with marvellous velocity, taking only three nights and two days for the whole distance from London. But this speed was thought to be highly dangerous to the head, independently of all the perils of an overturn, and stories were told of men and women who, having reached London with such celerity, died suddenly of an affection of the brain. My family and friends were seriously alarmed for me

and advised me at all events to stay a day at York to recruit myself." The fares he mentions were £10 from Edinburgh to London; to York, £4, 15s.; and from York to London, £5.

In 1836 the speed of some of the mail coaches was nearly ten miles an hour including stoppages, and this was kept up over very long distances. From Edinburgh to London, a distance of 400 miles, the time allowed was forty-five and a half hours; from London to York, 197 miles, twenty hours; from London to Holyhead, 259 miles, twenty-seven hours. The time-bills of the old mail coaches are most interesting, and they show how complete was the organisation of the service. There was a column for the distance between each place, another column for the time allowed, and another column for the actual arrival and starting times. The numbers of the coach and the timepiece which it carried were recorded, and the delivery of the timepiece "safe" was always signed for at the conclusion of the journey.

The coachman, though not a Post Office servant—he was employed by the contractors—always wore a brilliant uniform; and the mail guard, an officer of the Postmaster-General, also arrayed in bright uniform, carried firearms. The mail guard had to see that time was kept, and especially that there was no delay in the time allowed for refreshments. The instructions to guards bring home to us the ways of the road a hundred years ago. At the beginning of the last century the chief superintendent of mail coaches was Thomas Hasker, an official of the Post Office. His instructions, written in homely language, seem to be instinct with a vitalising influence which was speeding up the whole system. What to him was the safety of mere passengers compared with the punctual delivery of his

Majesty's mails? To the postmaster of Ipswich he wrote: "Tell Mr. Foster to get fresh horses immediately, and that I must see him in town next Monday. Shameful work—three hours and twenty minutes coming over his eighteen miles!" On the Exeter road the mail guards were instructed by him as follows: "You are not to stop at any place whatever to leave any letters at, but to blow your horn to give the people notice that you have got letters for them. Therefore if they do not choose to come out to receive them don't you get down from your dicky, but take them on to Exeter and bring them back with you on your next journey." Again an instruction to the mail guards reads: "If the coachman go into a public-house to drink, don't you go with him and make the stop longer, but hurry him out."

The halt for refreshments was always an annoying necessity to Hasker. A guard had attempted to hurry out the passengers as well as the driver. And the passengers had complained. "Sir," wrote Hasker, "stick to your bill and never mind what passengers say respecting waiting overtime. Is it not the fault of the landlord to keep them so long? Some day when you have waited a considerable time (suppose five or eight minutes longer than is allowed by the bill), drive away and leave them behind." We can imagine a guard acting on this instruction and losing his tips!

The guards were expected to be as regular as clockpieces, but even Mr. Hasker had sometimes to reckon with them as human beings. "The superintendents," he writes in another memorandum, "will please to observe that Mr. Hasker does not wish to be too hard on the guards. Such a thing as a joint of meat or a couple of fowls or any other article for their own family in moderation he does not wish to debar them

from the privilige of carrying." But he was against the guards assisting the poachers.

Even in those days Post Office servants were obliged to give written explanation of their misdeeds, and they occasionally scored against their fault-finders. A mail guard had been reported for impertinence by certain contractors who were notorious for the indifferent lights with which they supplied their coaches. The mail guard admitted his offence, "but," he slyly added, "perhaps something may be said for the feelings of a guard that hears the continual complaints of passengers against bad lights and the disagreeable smell of stinking oil, especially when through such things the passengers withhold the gratuity which the guard expects." There is some dignity in this way of putting the matter.

The mails were of course the first consideration on the coaches. The available room after the loading of the mails was given to passengers' luggage, and this had frequently to be reduced by the passenger himself before starting. The great trouble with the guards was the temptation to overload the coaches. A contributor to the *Quarterly Review* in 1837 said: "Yet notwithstanding the moral improvement of the drivers, the improved state of the high roads throughout the kingdom, stage-coach travelling is more dangerous than it was before owing to the unmerciful speed of the swift coaches and the unmerciful loads which are piled upon the others like Pelion upon Ossa, or suspended from them, wherever they can be hung on. 'Coachman,' said an outside passenger who was being driven at a furious rate over one of the most mountainous roads in England, 'have you no consideration for our lives and limbs?' 'What are your lives and limbs to me?' was the reply, 'I'm behind my time.'" Sometimes the driver himself

suffered after a spell of bad weather which had rutted the roads. Mr. Hasker reported that "the York coachman and guard were both chucked from their seats going down to Huntingdon last journey, and coming up the guard is lost this morning, supposed from the same cause, as the passengers say he was blowing his horn just before they missed him." These were strenuous days, and weather conditions, especially after a fall of snow, were formidable enemies to the time-keeping of the guards. Robberies of the mail were far less frequent than in the days of the post-horses, and the roads, thanks to the splendid efforts of the great engineers Telford and Macadam, were immensely improved, but snow and flood were still to be reckoned with. It was one of the sights of London to see the mail coaches start at night from the Swan with Two Necks and the Bull and Mouth in Aldersgate Street. A small crowd was usually to be seen at Hyde Park Corner watching the westward-bound coaches go by on their night journey.

The great coaching event of the year was the procession of mail coaches which took place in London on the King's Birthday, and heading the procession was usually the oldest established mail, the Bristol coach. In 1834 there were twenty-seven coaches in the procession. At the start from Millbank "the bells of the churches rang out merrily, continuing their rejoicing peals till the coaches arrived at the General Post Office." I quote from a book, *Annals of the Road:* "In the cramped interior of the vehicle were closely packed buxom dames and blooming lassies, the wives, daughters, or sweethearts of the coachmen or guards, the fair passengers arrayed in coal-scuttle bonnets and in canary-coloured or scarlet silk. But the great feature after all was that stirring note so clearly blown and

well drawn out, and every now and again sounded by the guards and alternated with such airs as 'The Days when we went Gipsying,' capitally played on a key-bugle. Should a mail come late, the tune from a passing one would be, "Oh dear! what can the matter be?'"

I have already spoken of the mail-coach era as the romantic age of the General Post Office. English literature and English art have drawn upon the real and legendary history of the period for much of their inspiration. Nobody has revealed to us with more vivacity the humours of the mail coach than Charles Dickens—did not Mr. Tony Weller drive a coach?—nobody has written of the glories of the mail coach with greater power than Thomas de Quincey. De Quincey has described one journey in particular which lives in our literature. The mail was carrying with it into the country districts the news of a great victory. "From eight P.M. to fifteen or twenty minutes later, imagine the mails assembled on parade in Lombard Street, where at that time and not at St. Martin's le Grand was seated the General Post Office. In what exact strength we mustered I do not remember, but from the length of each separate *attelage* we filled the street, though a long one, and though we were drawn up in double file. On *any* night the spectacle was beautiful. The absolute perfection of all the appointments about the carriages and the harness, their strength, their brilliant cleanliness, their beautiful simplicity—but more than all, the royal magnificence of the horses—were what might first have fixed the attention. Every carriage on every morning in the year was taken down to an official inspector for examination, wheels, axles, linchpins, pole, glasses, lamps were all critically probed and tested. . . . But the night

before us was a night of victory, and behold! to the ordinary display what a heart-shaking addition!—horses, men, carriages, all are dressed in laurels and flowers, oak-leaves and ribbons." Then De Quincey describes how in every village they pass through there are people waiting for the news; how the cheers are taken up all along the road, as the mail coach in the days before the telegraph carried the good tidings through the Kingdom. The coach bore not only letters but newspapers, and these were increasing every year. What a change from the time of the old postboys! Sir Walter Scott said that a friend of his remembered the letter-bag arriving in Edinburgh during the year 1745 with but one letter in it!

There is something quite tragic in the fact that at the very time when travelling by road had reached its perfection in this country as regards speed and punctuality, a new force was at work which was to overthrow the mail coach not gradually, but within a few years. On the introduction of the railway in any district the coach service collapsed almost immediately as a medium for carrying the mails. And the great main roads of the country were for thirty years or more almost abandoned except by the local traffic in the districts which they passed through. Telford, the great engineer, had only recently reconstructed the magnificent road which runs from Shrewsbury to Holyhead, which was to be the means of beating all records in the speeding up of the Irish mail, but the railway gave it the appearance of a white elephant. For a long time grass could be seen growing in places in the centre of the road. "The calamity of railways has fallen upon us," said Macadam, the great engineer of the main roads.

There was undoubtedly an appeal to the spirit of

romance and adventure in early Post Office methods. De Quincey tells us that when travelling by train to York he was not personally aware that he had been going forty or fifty miles an hour. But on a coach he knew he was going at a rollicking speed: "the sensibility of the horse uttering itself in the maniac light in his eye: we heard our speed: we saw it: we felt it as a thrilling, and this speed was not the product of blind insensate agencies."

Then there was the fascination of the great highway—the thin white line, sometimes straight, sometimes winding—which was human and alive in a way that a railway track can never be. Men were not then simply driven or shot into places; they drove through places; and they touched life at every point of the road.

The Post Office is, however, not administered by poets and artists, but by men of the type of Thomas Hasker. And to men like him the coming of the mail train was a matter for official rejoicing. For it meant the speeding up still further of his Majesty's mails.

CHAPTER II

THE PENNY POST

It would be unjust to the memory of a great postal reformer to say that George Stephenson was the real author of Penny Postage, but it is quite fair to submit that it was the coming of the mail train which made Sir Rowland Hill's reform the great success which it ultimately became. It is true Sir Rowland Hill worked out his scheme when the mail coaches were still running, and it was a part of his case that the reform could be carried through with existing methods of carrying the mails, but it is open to serious doubt whether he could have succeeded had not the vast possibilities of the railway as an agent of the Post Office been before the minds of the people of this country when the plan was being discussed in Parliament and in the country. That the coming of the mail train was a probability in Sir Rowland Hill's own mind and was an incentive to his efforts while he was working out his scheme, is suggested by a comparison of dates. Sir Rowland Hill's plan was published in 1837. In September 1830 the Liverpool and Manchester Railway was opened: in 1833 the London and Birmingham, now the London and North-Western, opened its first section, and by the year 1837 there were in existence the beginnings of the South-Eastern, the London and South-Western, the Great Western, and the Great Eastern Railways, all known at that date under much less ambitious titles. Mr. F. E.

The Penny Post

Baines, C.B., in his vivid and entertaining book, *Forty Years at the Post Office*, has described the death of the old and the birth of the new system on the Great North Road. As late as April 1838 the high-road held its traffic, but from the date of the opening from London of the first considerable section of the Birmingham railway the fate of the highway was settled, "for then began this fell opponent to sap the long traffic of the Great North Road."

It is curious now to know that one of the objections raised to the mails going by railway was the doubt that trains could journey by night. No less a person than the President of the Society of Engineers at that time said, "If mails and passengers were conveyed, policemen would be required along the line during the night." Policemen, indeed, were stationed on the Leeds and Selby line until the night train had passed. Other authorities were of opinion that the lines would have to be lit up throughout with gas or other lights.

The agitation for Penny Postage arose out of the excessive and unequal charges and the abuses which had grown up in order to evade the charges. The Post Office had achieved wonders during the early years of the nineteenth century in speeding up the mails and in the organisation of the service. But there had been no attempt during that time to change materially the system of charging letters and newspapers sent by post. The root idea at the back of the old system was payment by distance and on delivery of the posted packet. It is unnecessary to give a table of the different charges which were in existence; it is enough to supply only two illustrations. A single letter between London and Edinburgh or Glasgow cost 1s. 3½d. The average produce of a letter in 1837 was about 7d.

To a large proportion of the poorer people of this



THE TRAVELLING POST OFFICE.

The pouch which has been discharged from the wayside standard into the net attached to the train.



THE TRAVELLING POST OFFICE.

The apparatus on the exterior of a mail carriage. Two pouches are extended for despatch and the net lowered into position for the receipt of incoming pouches.

country the charges were an almost prohibitive burden. Weight, of course, was also a considerable factor in determining the rate, and there is an instance of a packet weighing 32 ounces which was sent from Deal to London and the postage was £6, four times as much as the charge for an inside place by the coach. A large amount of irregular carriage of letters was continually going on; and there were other means of evading the charges. There is the familiar instance of Coleridge, who, when wandering through the Lake District one day, saw a poor woman refuse a letter which the postman offered her. Coleridge, out of sympathy for the poor woman, paid the money she could not raise, but the letter when opened proved to be a blank sheet of paper not intended for acceptance but sent by her son, according to preconcerted agreement, as a sign that he was well. Smuggling in letters was practised almost openly, not only by private individuals but by large firms. A publisher and school agent openly boasted that he adopted evasions of the postal laws which enabled him to receive letters from Glasgow for 2d. on which the Post Office would have levied at least 1s. 1d. Out of every 236 private letters which he received, 169 came to him otherwise than by post. A man starting on a tour in Scotland arranged with his family a plan for informing them of his progress and state of health without putting them to the expense of postage. It was managed in this way. He carried with him a number of old newspapers, one of which he put into the post daily. The postmark with the date showed his progress, and the state of his health was shown by the selection of the names from a list previously agreed upon with which the newspaper was franked. Sir Rowland Hill told the story, and he said he re-

membered that the name of Sir Francis Burdett denoted "Vigorous health."

Then there was the franking privilege, by means of which all letters franked by peers and members of Parliament went free. Members of Parliament sometimes signed franks by the packet and gave them to constituents and friends. A trade was actually carried on in franks by the servants of members of Parliament, and their practice was to ask their masters to sign the franks in great numbers at a time. Forgery of franks was a frequent offence. About seventy years ago an old Irish lady informed a Post Office servant that she seldom paid any postage for letters, and that her correspondence never cost her friends anything. The official asked her how she managed this. "Oh," she said, "I just wrote 'Fred. Suttie' in the corner of the cover of the letter and then, sure, nothing more was charged for it." She was asked, "Were you not afraid of being hanged for forgery?" "Oh, dear, no," she replied, "nobody ever heard of a lady being hanged in Ireland, and troth I did just what everybody else did."

The system of payment on delivery of a letter was the cause of perpetual delays and numerous frauds. When a postman was obliged to collect at every house the necessary postage, it was extremely difficult to regulate his rounds. The temptation to defraud the Post Office, his master, was also frequently yielded to by him.

A large amount of money was every year obviously being lost to the Post Office in these different ways. A public opinion was in existence that the charges of the Post Office were unjust and excessive, and the moral sense of the community was not always alive enough to recognise any wrong in dodging the Government.

To put the matter briefly, the rate for a single inland

letter in 1837 was 4d. for 15 miles, 6d. for 30 miles, 7d. for 50 miles, and so on up to 1s. for each additional hundred miles: in certain places only was there a local penny post, and in London there were twopenny and threepenny posts. Each person in the United Kingdom received on an average only five posted packets a year. This was the year when the change from mail coach to mail train was most marked. A mail was conveyed from London to Liverpool and Manchester in 16½ hours: the secret of the speed was that the mail was carried by coach from London to Birmingham, and there put on the railway which was open to Liverpool and Manchester. The last of the mail coaches, that from Norwich and Newmarket, arrived in London on the 6th January 1846.

The Reform Bill had been passed, a reforming Government was in power, and measures of social amelioration were being discussed in all quarters. Trade and commerce were making strides, the habit of travel was growing with the people, and the need for simpler and easier methods of communicating with one another was urgent. There was a grand opportunity for a postal reformer. And the need of the time brought forth the man.

There had been postal reformers before Rowland Hill. First of all in time and distinction was Witherings, who lived in the middle of the seventeenth century. He became Master of the Posts in 1637, and he introduced a far-reaching system of postal rates, which before had been extremely casual and excessive. He made the Post Office a paying concern. He created the Post Office as we know it to-day. Then there was Dockwra, who established a penny post for the London district which existed 120 years. Only in the price had this reform any relation to Sir Rowland Hill's

scheme, which was based on the idea that a uniform charge should cover any distance travelled. Dockwra's system was of course limited to short distances. Another great name in Post Office history is Ralph Allen, the Postmaster of Bath in 1719, who organised a system of cross posts all over the country. And in the first chapter I mentioned the achievements of Palmer, who established the mail-coach service.

Rowland Hill was born in 1795 at Kidderminster, and he began life as a schoolmaster. Very early he showed great talents as an organiser: his bent was towards mathematics, and he became secretary of Gibbon Wakefield's scheme for colonising South Australia. In this capacity his attention was specially directed to the abuses of our postal system. He approached the study of the system as an outsider: indeed until after his reform had been carried he had not been inside the walls of the General Post Office. He collected statistics, and it was the discovery that the length of a letter's journey made no appreciable difference to the cost of that journey which led him to think of uniformity of rates. He showed, for instance, that the cost of the mail-coach service for one journey between London and Edinburgh was about £5 a day. He then worked out the average load of the mail at six hundredweight, the cost of each hundredweight being therefore 16s. 8d. Taking the average weight of a letter at a quarter of an ounce, the cost of carriage over the 400 miles was $\frac{1}{576}$ part of a penny. Yet the actual postal charge was 1s. 3½d.

From the first the plan of Rowland Hill gained the support of the people, but he had to face a long and bitter opposition from the official chiefs of the Post Office and from the vested interests which were threatened by his action. Lord Lichfield, the Postmaster-

General at the time, said, as an argument against the idea, that the mails would have to carry twelve times as much in weight as before, and therefore the cost would be twelve times the amount they paid. "The walls of the Post Office," he exclaimed, "would burst, the whole area in which the building stands would not be large enough to receive the clerks and letters." Increase of business would mean a loss, not a gain, and Lord Lichfield had not the optimism of the old Irishwoman who, when endeavouring to sell her fowls, exclaimed, "I lose on every fowl I sell, but thank the Lord I sell a lot."

Sir Rowland Hill asked Lord Lichfield very pertinently whether the size of the building should be regulated by the amount of correspondence or the amount of correspondence by the size of the building.

One of the most curious arguments was that the British public would object to prepayment, that it was contrary to their habits and customs. There was no doubt something to be said for the idea that when you wrote a letter you had all the trouble, and you were conferring a benefit on your friend, who ought to be prepared to pay for it.

The plan triumphed. The Committee appointed to consider it recommended its adoption, and it was incorporated in the Budget of 1839. Lord Melbourne was the Prime Minister, and though not enthusiastic, was favourable. The strong feelings aroused in official circles are suggested by Lord Melbourne's remark after interviewing the Postmaster-General the day before the Bill was introduced into the House of Lords. "Lichfield has been here," said Lord Melbourne. "Why a man cannot talk of penny postage without getting into a passion, passes my understanding."

The Bill received the royal assent on the 17th August

1839, and after a preliminary experiment had been tried of a uniform rate of 1d. for London and 4d. for the rest of the country, in order to accustom the clerks to the system, a uniform rate of 1d. for letters not exceeding half an ounce was introduced on the 10th January. This was a busy day at post offices all over the country, and the opportunity was seized by hundreds of people to write letters to one another in honour of the occasion. About 112,000 packets were posted in London. A large number of letters were also written to Rowland Hill himself from all parts of the country, congratulating him and thanking him for his efforts. Tradesmen and business men were especially grateful for the Bill. Moreover the reform opened the doors of the Post Office to the poorer classes. The postman after 1840 was, it was said, "making long rounds through humble districts where heretofore his knock was rarely heard."

Rowland Hill was appointed to a post at the Treasury in 1840, in order to superintend the introduction of his scheme. He retired, however, in 1842, after Lord Melbourne's Ministry went out of office. On the return of the Liberals to power in 1846 he was appointed one of the Secretaries to the Postmaster-General, and in the same year he was presented by the public with £13,360 in gratitude for his services. In 1854 he was made Chief Secretary of the Post Office, and in 1862 he received the honour of knighthood. When he retired from the Post Office in 1864 he received from Parliament a grant of £20,000, and he was also allowed to retain his full salary of £2000 a year as retiring pension. In 1864 he received the degree of D.C.L. from the University of Oxford, and in 1879 he was granted the freedom of the City of London. He died in August of the same year, and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

The Penny Post

Many and great were the reforms introduced into the Post Office during Sir Rowland Hill's period of service as Secretary. In his letter of retirement addressed to the Lords of the Treasury in 1864, he gave an account of his stewardship in a statement entitled "Results of Post Office Reform." If we quote largely from this document it will be to show what Sir Rowland Hill claimed to have done, and it will also help the reader to understand from his own experience how far the Post Office has advanced since Sir Rowland Hill's day. First of all, Sir Rowland claimed "a very large reduction in the rates of postage on all correspondence, whether inland, foreign, or colonial. As instances in point it may be stated that letters are now conveyed from any part of the United Kingdom to any other part—even from the Channel Islands to the Shetland Isles—at one-fourth of the charge previously levied on letters passing between post towns only a few miles apart, and that the rate formerly charged for the slight distance—viz. fourpence—now suffices to carry a letter from any part of the United Kingdom to any part of France, Algeria included."

Then Sir Rowland claimed "the almost universal resort to prepayment of correspondence, and that by means of stamps," the establishment of the book post, the reduction in the fee for registered letters from 1s. to 4d., a reduction in the price of money orders combined with a great extension and improvement of the system, a more frequent and more rapid communication between the Metropolis and the larger provincial towns, as also between one provincial town and another, a vast extension of the rural distribution, and many other facilities for the public, including the establishment of Post Office Savings Banks. He

goes on to say: "The expectations I held out before the change were that eventually under the operation of my plans the number of letters would increase fivefold, the gross revenue would be the same as before, while the net revenue would sustain a loss of about £300,000. The actual figures show that the letters have increased not fivefold but nearly eight and a half fold, that the gross revenue, instead of remaining the same, has increased by about £1,500,000; while the net revenue, instead of falling £300,000, has risen more than £100,000."

This was written more than twenty years after the introduction of penny postage, but it must not be supposed that the reform was an immediate financial success. The last complete year (1839) of the old system of high rates yielded a profit of £1,659,000. The first complete year of the new system produced only £500,789. But in two years the number of chargeable letters passing through the post had increased from 72,000,000 per annum to 208,000,000, and in a few years the profit of 1839 had been passed.

Sir Rowland was a fighter and reformer to the last. Like all men who accomplish great things, he was exceedingly self-confident and impatient of opposition. The official mind works from precedent to precedent, and Sir Rowland proposed to make all things new. Effort after effort was made to push him aside without any lasting success. He was dismissed from the Treasury in the second year of penny postage, at a time when its very success seemed to depend on friends, not foes, directing the organisation. Thomas Hood wrote to him: "I have seen so many instances of folly and ingratitude similar to those you have met with that it would never surprise me to hear of the

railway people, some day, finding their trains running on so well, proposing to discharge the engines." It was more in obedience to the feeling of the country than to any liking for the reformer that the Government of the day appointed him to the Post Office four years after his dismissal from the Treasury.

Sir Rowland was always perhaps a little uncomfortable as a Post Office chief. He was in the midst of men against whom he had been working for years, and there are many stories in existence of his caustic way of dealing with his staff. Anthony Trollope, who was in the service of the Post Office at the time, ventured one day to point out to Sir Rowland that the language in a certain report, if literally construed, might be held to mean what was not intended. Sir Rowland replied: "You must be aware, Mr. Trollope, that a phrase is not always intended to bear a literal construction. For instance, when I write to one of you gentlemen, I end my letter with the words, 'I am, Sir, your obedient servant,' whereas you know I am nothing of the sort." Indeed nobody could have used this official phrase with less sincerity than Sir Rowland Hill.

But I like best this story of Rowland Hill in the evening of his days, after he had retired from the Post Office. It is pleasant to think of him still absorbed in the subject which had made his name a household word. His daughter, in her biography of him, tells us that whenever he met any foreign visitors, he was bound sooner or later to ask them about postal matters in their own country. He met Garibaldi at a banquet, and the inevitable question was put to him, but Sir Rowland could not work up any interest on the part of the Italian statesman in the matter. Sir Rowland complained to his brother of his disappoint-

ment in Garibaldi; he evidently thought him an overrated man, especially in the matter of intelligence, and the brother replied, "When you go to heaven I foresee that you will stop at the gate to inquire of St. Peter how many deliveries they have a day, and how the expense of postal communication between heaven and the other place is defrayed."

It was of course this absorption in his subject which gave him the victory. Penny Postage was probably inevitable, even if there had been no Rowland Hill in this country. Railways alone made a change in the postal service necessary, but it is to the lasting credit of Sir Rowland that he obtained the reform years before it would otherwise have been achieved. He carried the reform by assault, and the nation might have waited long years before the vested interests in the old system had given way to the needs of the nation. "Loss to the revenue" was the argument chiefly directed against Sir Rowland Hill's scheme: it is the argument still used when further concessions are asked for by the public. The reply that the Post Office exists for the convenience of the public is not always appreciated by the Chancellor of the Exchequer for the time being. He looks to the Post Office to provide him annually with a substantial sum of money. Perhaps the complete vindication of Sir Rowland Hill lies in the fact that roughly speaking the whole of the annual surplus from the Post Office at the present day is derived from the writer of the penny inland letter.

CHAPTER III

LOMBARD STREET AND ST. MARTIN'S LE GRAND

NOTHING will give the reader a better idea of the advances made by the Post Office during the last two hundred years than a comparison of the various buildings which have from time to time been the home of the General Post Office in London. The story of the buildings is one of continued growth and expansion right down to the present day. The General Post Office is always becoming too small and inconvenient for its work. And there has scarcely been any period when it was not necessary to rent overflow premises to meet the growing needs of the times.

As I have already pointed out, the system of posts in the time of the Tudors was used chiefly for the conveyance of Government despatches. The Master of the Posts was a Court official, and there was no need for a public office in London. The extension of postal business, especially between London and the Continent, required, however, in the later years of the sixteenth century, an office in the City of London, and according to *Stow's Survey* a post office was first established in Cloak Lane, near Dowgate Hill. This is the hill on which Cannon Street Station now stands, and it was also the centre of Roman London. The necessity of the foreign post was one of the reasons for the creation of the office, and it is a link between this time and our own that the continental mail train now starts

from Cannon Street Station. Scarcely anything is known of this post office except the bare fact of its existence.

From Dowgate Hill the General Post Office was removed, at some date in the first half of the seventeenth century, to the sign of the Black Swan in Bishopsgate. These were most probably what we now call licensed premises: at any rate Pepys has recorded that on one occasion he went "to the musique-meeting at the Post Office." Then happened the Great Plague of 1664–1665, and we have the benefit of a report from the senior officer as to the way in which the visitation affected the Post Office. "That dureing the late dreadfull sickness when many of the members of the office desert the same and that betweene 20 and 30 of the members dyed thereof, your petitioner, considering rather the dispatch of your Majesty's service than the preservation of himself and family, did hazard them all, and continued all that woefull tyme in the said office to give dispatch and conveyance to your Majesty's letters and pacquetts, and to preserve your revenue arising from the same." The writer was evidently a pushful official who expected recognition of his services, and in yet a fuller petition for a reward for keeping the Post Office open during the Plague he begs that he may have an order to the Commissioners of Prizes to deliver to him some brown and white sugar granted to him by His Majesty from the ship *Espérance* of Nantes, condemned as a prize at Plymouth. I hope he obtained his sugar: in our days we should have made him a K.C.B. Then came the Great Fire of 1666, and the Post Office was burnt out. In an old newspaper of 1666 may be seen this advertisement: "The General Post Office is for the present held at the Two Black Pillars in Bridges Street over against the Fleece Tavern.

Covent Garden, till a more convenient Place can be found in London."

As soon as the City was rebuilt "the more convenient Place" was found in a house in Lombard Street, and by the year 1680, if not earlier, the General Post Office moved into its new premises. The house had been the private residence of Sir Robert Viner, a city dignitary who had been Lord Mayor of London, and it was rented from him. This was the home of the Head Office for nearly 150 years. Comparatively little is known of the history of this office, and a writer to whom I am indebted for much of my information writes justly "that one cannot escape a feeling half of wonder and half of shame that so few records should remain of an office where possibly Milton and certainly Dryden posted their letters." But what we do know about this office is exceedingly interesting.

There were officials occupying positions which go by the same name as at the present day. There were the Postmasters-General, a dual office which in the early part of the eighteenth century was non-political, and the Postmasters-General were entitled to live at the General Post Office and to have free coals, candles, and tinware. There was a Receiver-General with a salary of £150, an Accountant-General with a salary of £200, a Comptroller of the Inland Office, six Clerks of the Roads, a Secretary to the Postmaster-General, and a Postmaster-General's Clerk. Positions which are not known in these days were Windowman and Alphabet Keeper—this man handed out letters to callers, and his other title probably referred to the pigeon-holes in which the letters were kept. There was a "Mail Maker"—a maker of leather bags for letters—the Stores Department in its early beginnings—and there were three Letter Bringers. One official

known as the Ratcatcher received £1 a year for his useful services, another man described as a "Scavenger" received £3, 6s. a year and was in charge of the drainage, which was probably below suspicion.

But perhaps the difference between these times and our own is most directly marked by two entries in the accounts of the period. There were two allowances of £30 each for beer for clerks and sorters, and once a year at least £20 was allowed for a feast for the resident clerks. This was usually held on the King's Birthday, and "the musique-meeting" at the Post Office which Pepys attended may have been one of these feasts. In an old newspaper of 1708 there is an account of one of the feasts, and the text of one of the songs is given. The writer says: "Some of the songs were made up as letters, and the Postboy blowing his horn rode into the Hall to the surprise of all that were present and distributed his letters from Parnassus. Indeed the people might very well be surprised, it being a country where hardly any one could think we held any correspondence. At the same time that the boy sounded his horn, Mr. —— rose up and sung the song." The author of the particular song, extracts from which we give, was stated to hold "a very genteel place in the General Post Office relating to the Foreign letters, being master of several languages." Truth, however, compels us to state his salary was only £40 a year. Here are two verses of "A Song Performed at the Post Office Feast on Her Majesty's Birthday 1708. Written by Mr. Motteux, set by Mr. Leveridge:"—

"Room, room for the Post, who with zeal for the Queen
Like Pegasus flies, tho' his scrub is but lean,
Tho' dirty or dusty,
Tho' thirsty yet trusty,

The restless knight-errant,
While Anna's his warrant,
(True knight of the road) of high honours can boast,
The greatest of subjects give way to the post.

Chorus

With a twee-we-we, twee-we-we think it no scorn,
Cits, soldiers, and courtiers give way to the horn.

The secrets we hand, of the fair and the great,
And join, spite of distance, each region and state,
All nations and quarters,
Dutch, Irish, and Tartars,
The bonny North Briton,
And more I can't hit on.
Of all our Queen's subjects none serve her so fast,
For still in her service we're all in post haste.

Chorus

With a twee-we-we, twee we-we, &c."

In a little book entitled *A Picture of London in 1808* I have found the following delightful passage relating to the London Post Office: "It is the most important spot on the surface of the globe. It receives information from the Poles." This is rather wide of the mark, seeing that both Poles were then undiscovered. The next statement may have been nearer the truth: "It distributes instructions to the Antipodes." And we seem to get out of our depth farther on: "It is in the highest degree hitherto realised the seat of terrestrial perceptions and volition. It is the brain of the whole earth." But all this tall language was used for a purpose. The object was to draw attention to a public scandal and to bring before the notice of people the miserable accommodation which the State provided for her wise and brainy servants. For the writer asks

us to look on the other side of the picture. "The building is hidden in a narrow alley, misshapen even to deformity, and scarcely accessible to the very mail coaches which collect there for their nightly freights."

It was indeed the introduction of the mail coach which made the Lombard Street office unsuitable for its purpose. The coaches were obliged to stand in the street itself, and only two or three could be in place at the same time. Various sites were suggested for the new office, and as increased space was the great necessity, it was decided to clear away the rookeries which existed in the liberty of St. Martin's and to build there. The district had deteriorated lamentably since the days of the College of St. Martin's le Grand which stood there for several centuries, and which has an interesting and distinguished history. The district has older associations still, and during the clearing of the sites for the Post Office buildings many interesting remains of the Roman occupation of London were found. In 1818 a very ancient vaulted chamber, built in part of Roman materials, which had been previously concealed beneath the more modern houses, was exposed to view. Sections of the Roman wall have also been discovered, and many other remains, probably of a later date, built out of Roman materials. The College of St. Martin's le Grand possessed the privilege of sanctuary, and this fact may have explained the evil repute of the neighbourhood. It became a rogues' quarter, and great must have been the relief of Londoners when a statute of James I. abolished all privileges of sanctuary. Yet the inhabitants seem to have been able to retain many privileges. They retained their own court for the trial of minor offences: they could keep the place as filthy as they liked until it became a breeding-place for the plague, which



Photo *Clarke & Hyde.*

TELEGRAMS ON TELEPHONE WIRES.

To save delay, while one subscriber is speaking on a line by telephone, the next call is being arranged by telegraphic communication over the same line, neither operation interfering with the other.



A street at St. Martin's le Grand before the clearances were made for the General Post Office. The district originally possessed the privilege of sanctuary, and was, in the early part of the nineteenth century, one of the most disreputable localities in London.

regularly broke out at intervals during the seventeenth century, and they appointed their own police or watchmen.

The site was purchased by the City with duties levied on coals brought into London. And the Government obtained the property from the City at a cost of £240,000.

It is amusing to notice, in the report of the Committee which considered the question of the new building, how afraid its members were that in the desire for beauty of style the question of utility would be neglected. Post Office architects have seldom needed this caution. "Ornamental decorations introduced for the mere purpose of embellishment, and unconcerned with utility, while they prodigiously enhance the cost, rarely produce an effect in point of elegance and grandeur which can compensate for it." And yet again, "an office for the receiving and delivery of letters which should be concealed behind a front fit for a palace, and flanked by triumphal arches, would present an incongruity no less offensive to good taste than inconsistent with rational economy." Here speaks the voice which in the early years of the nineteenth century produced so many evil results in street architecture.

The architect of the new building was Mr. Smirke, and it is certainly to his credit that he was not unduly influenced by the recommendations of the Committee. The site covered two acres, and the clearance displaced a thousand inhabitants. It swept away numbers of alleys and courts, and when the building itself was opened in 1829 it at once took its place as a great addition to the architectural beauty of the City of London. Everybody who has visited London must be familiar with at least the exterior of the building. It was

designed to meet the needs of the mail coach service, yet no sooner was the building opened than the sound of railways began to be heard in the land. But for nearly ten years the mail coaches started from St. Martin's le Grand, and traces of this era can be seen in the drive which goes round the building with an open courtyard at the north end. The Bull and Mouth Yard where the coaches were made up was opposite.

One of the features of the building was a lofty central hall, and through it was a public thoroughfare to Foster Lane. The letters were posted in this hall, and the scene at six o'clock was always one of great animation. Little by little as the needs of the service became different and more pressing, the internal architecture of St. Martin's le Grand was altered almost beyond recognition. The great hall was closed, and the space thrown into the Sorting Office. "No indignity that can possibly be heaped on the poor old thing can add to its disfigurement," wrote Mr. R. W. Johnston, an admirer of the original building. And he added: "The place has been practically disembowelled, and what has been taken out of the bottom has been placed on the top, with the result that an absolutely pure design has been converted into a nondescript of the most extraordinary character." This was inevitable from the point of view of utility, but the constant patching up could not go on indefinitely. In later years the letter and newspaper branches of the service monopolised the whole of the old building, but in its early days it took in practically the whole of the Head Office. Here worked Colonel Maberley, who had been Sir Rowland Hill's chief official opponent; here worked later the two men together rather uncomfortably, and with little in common.

Just as in the case of Lombard Street, the story of St. Martin's le Grand would be incomplete without some

attempt to realise the human elements which went to make up its life during the years of its prime. The Post Office has always suffered in reputation both in the eyes of the public and of the Treasury from the accepted idea that its duties are mainly confined to sorting letters. Gentlemen high up in the Secretarial Department have sometimes been asked seriously by their friends whether they had noticed some particular letter in the course of its transmission through the post. The public scarcely realise the amount of financial and technical knowledge required on the part of men who have to organise the service, to enter into contracts with railways and steamship companies, or to preserve the discipline of the vast staff in town and country. This was the kind of work done at St. Martin's le Grand, and the men of the early and mid-Victorian period were workers in the full sense of the word.

The old riddle, "Why are Civil Servants like the fountains in Trafalgar Square?" with the answer, "Because they play from ten to four," has never applied to the Post Office. The needs of the service forbade any slackness, and punctuality has always been a realised ideal. West End offices have frequently looked on aghast at the zeal and industry of St. Martin's le Grand. I remember a post office clerk telling me one day of an official call he had to make at the Colonial Office in the days before Mr. Chamberlain put new life into that Department. "I arrived there at a quarter to eleven, and found the door shut, and as I was hunting around to find the visitors' bell, a milkman bore towards me and said, 'I don't think they're up yet, sir,' so I took a turn round the Park and at ten minutes past eleven I went back again, and finding the charwoman had just started work, I explained to her my errand, and asked her to tell the Secretary of State that I was on

the mat. "Oh," said she, "I don't think anybody's come yet. We don't begin till eleven." But I merely ventured to point out that the Horse Guards' clock was nearly a quarter past eleven. Then this pampered menial drew herself up, and with a look of scorn, replied, "I daresay you are right, young man, but the gentlemen in this orfis don't bind theirselves to be 'ere on the stroke of the hour." That was the difference between the City and the West End; the gentlemen of the Post Office bound themselves to be at their posts at the hour, and to come early and to stay late.

Officials have worked at St. Martin's le Grand who were men of letters in two senses of the word. Anthony Trollope began his career as a post office clerk here, and the insistence on punctuality was his chief difficulty. He could not be punctual, and though he said he could write official letters rapidly, correctly, and to the purpose, the steady, young, punctual but much less efficient clerk was usually preferred before him. But Trollope was a very difficult official to deal with. He says in his *Autobiography*: "I have no doubt that I made myself disagreeable. I know that I sometimes tried to be so." And yet for many years he was an exceedingly useful public servant, and was frequently engaged on special work for the department. An old colleague of his has described Trollope's method of doing his official work. "I have seen him slogging away at papers at a stand-up desk with his handkerchief stuffed into his mouth and his hair on end, as though he could barely contain himself." He was very overbearing and intolerant in his manner, and was certainly not popular at the Post Office. There is on record, however, one occasion when he must have been unusually pleasant. He was the clerk in waiting one evening, and a message came to him that the Queen of Saxony wanted to see the night

mails sent out by the mail coaches. This was one of the sights of London at the time, and Trollope acted the part of showman. When he had finished he was handed half-a-crown by one of the suite. This, he said, was a bad moment for him.

"Why don't you pay an old woman sixpence a week to fret for you?" he said to a postmaster who came to him with grievances. The postmaster left his presence with an additional grievance that Mr. Trollope was a brute.

Sir Rowland Hill might have agreed with this postmaster, for he could never get on with Trollope. We can scarcely be surprised. In his *Autobiography*, Trollope says of Sir Rowland that "it was a pleasure to me to differ from Sir Rowland Hill on all occasions, and looking back now, I think that in all such differences I was right." Such a confession explains much of Trollope's unpopularity. There is no place where omniscience is less appreciated than in a Government office. Mr. O'Connor Morris, who was the Postmaster-General of Jamaica when Trollope visited the island in 1858, has left on record this judgment on the novelist's official conduct to him. "I believe Mr. Trollope had a thousand good qualities of head and heart, which were disguised in a most unfortunate and repelling manner."

Edmund Yates also worked at St. Martin's le Grand, and he has described very graphically the kind of scene which usually took place when Trollope was interviewing Sir Rowland Hill. "Trollope would bluster and rave and roar, blowing and spluttering like a grampus, while the pale old gentleman opposite him, sitting back in his arm-chair and regarding his antagonist furtively under his spectacles, would remain perfectly quiet until he saw his chance, and then

deliver himself of the most unpleasant speech he could frame in the hardest possible tone."

There is a good story told of Yates himself. The Post Office Library was founded in 1858. There were many unredressed grievances among the clerical staff in those days, and when Mr. Rowland Hill undertook to give a lecture on astronomy to the Library subscribers, a practical if somewhat unfair opportunity seemed given to the clerks to bring their necessities before the chief. Mr. Hill asked for a shilling from his audience in order to illustrate an eclipse. He wished to pass it between the eye and a lamp. Busy fingers went diving into purses and pockets for moons. After two or three minutes waiting Mr. Hill beheld an array of blank faces and shaking heads, and he naturally looked puzzled. Then Edmund Yates arose. "I beg to explain, sir, that we are all very anxious to try the experiment which you suggest, but unfortunately we cannot find a shilling among us." On the whole we may wonder what type of man Sir Rowland Hill found the most trying to deal with at the Post Office, the man of genius or the hidebound official.

In the days before competitive examinations and the abolition of patronage, there were more "characters" and "individualities" in the Post Office service than in these degenerate days. St. Martin's le Grand has had its share of officials who were men of the world, men of letters, and eccentric men. Frank Ives Scudamore, the author of *Day Dreams of a Sleepless Man* and much light verse, will always be remembered at the Post Office as a chief who did everything magnificently and on the grand scale: even in his failures he was great. And everybody who worked under him seemed to catch his enthusiasm for work.

St. Martin's le Grand

But we must leave these personal matters and get back to the buildings. With the acquirement of the telegraphs by the State, and the necessity for devoting an entire building to the London Postal Service, the erection of another big office became imperative. The building known as G.P.O. West was completed in 1873, and for a long time it provided accommodation for the Secretary's, Solicitor's, Engineer-in-chief's, and Central Telegraph Offices, together with a portion of the Receiver and Accountant Generals' Department.

In twenty years the need for extension became again pressing, and in 1895 the huge building known as G.P.O. North was opened. G.P.O. West was then given up to the Telegraph Service, and all the administrative offices were transferred to G.P.O. North. But these three immense buildings even in 1894 were by no means large enough to hold all the activities of the Post Office. The Parcel Post, the Money and Postal Order Departments, and the Post Office Savings Bank Department were all housed in other parts of the City of London, and there were overflow premises in streets near St. Martin's le Grand.

In this chapter we are only concerned with St. Martin's le Grand, and it is not without regret for the severance of old ties that Londoners witnessed in 1910 the closing of Smirke's fine post office, and the migration of the staff to King Edward's Building, henceforth to be the home of the London Postal Service. Not a hundred years had passed since the move from Lombard Street, and the Post Office had become a small nation of itself. And this body of men and women has for years regarded St. Martin's le Grand as the metropolis of their nation, and when they have stood under the big clock which has seen so many mails arrive and depart, they have felt that they were citizens of no mean city.

CHAPTER IV

KING EDWARD'S BUILDING

IN every big town the post office is now one of the most important, while in some cases it is the most imposing of all the local public buildings. Here the head postmaster is to be found, and here all the post office business of the district is administered. People have often asked me, "Who is the postmaster of London?" They understand that the Postmaster-General and the Secretary have their offices at St. Martin's le Grand, but it is evident that these gentlemen are the supreme heads of the whole Post Office system, and are not specially concerned with London. "Is there not a postmaster of London, just as there is one of Birmingham and of Liverpool?" The answer is that there is a London head postmaster, but his official title is Controller of the London Postal Service. Until a comparatively recent period he shared a building with the Postmaster-General and Secretary, and the dignity of his office was perhaps a little obscured by the presence of the greater luminaries. Latterly, however, the old building at St. Martin's le Grand became practically the chief London post office, and all the big administrative departments moved to the other side of the road. But old associations take long to die, and I do not think that even Post Office servants have ever looked upon the old building as belonging specially to London; they have thought of it still as a portion of the big administrative department which

has monopolised so much of the district of St. Martin's le Grand.

It is not therefore merely a fancy of my own that for the first time London possesses in King Edward's Building a head post office which is worthy of her, and which bears the same relations to the London district as the post office in Liverpool does to the Liverpool district. London is the biggest city in the world; it now possesses the biggest post office in the world. That is as it should be. It is London's chief office in a way that the old building never was. It has been built for London, and is fitted up entirely to meet the needs of London. Nobody who knows the old building could have said this of the inconvenient and out-of-date structure which was built for other times and other purposes.

The site of the new building covers ground which up to the beginning of the thirteenth century was one of the numerous vacant spaces in the north-west portion of the area enclosed by the Roman wall which went round the City of London. This wall, it is conjectured, was built between A.D. 350 and A.D. 369, only about half a century before Rome withdrew her legions from Britain. It belongs, therefore, to the later period of the Roman occupation of this country. A large section of this wall was discovered by the workmen when digging the foundations for King Edward's building, and it extended for about 400 feet. Most of this had to be destroyed and carried away, but a fine bastion at the western angle has been preserved, and can be inspected by visitors. The wall is built in the usual Roman method, and is composed of Kentish ragstone from the Maidstone district. In the ditch which ran outside the wall were discovered a number of Norman and mediæval relics, and within the wall many Roman

remains. The section of wall laid bare by the workmen was found underneath the playground and dining-hall of Christ's Hospital, known to us all as the Bluecoat School. The school removed from the building some years ago into the country, and the site was then sold and divided between Bartholomew's Hospital and the General Post Office.

The foundation stone of the new post office was laid by King Edward VII. on the 10th October 1905, and it was opened for public business on the 7th November 1910. The building is constructed of Portland cement concrete, strengthened by bars of steel, on what is known as the Hennibique reinforced concrete system, and it is the largest building that has yet been erected on this plan. It is an all-in-one-piece building, fashioned out of Thames ballast and cement. Not a single steel joist has been used in the centre construction. Barge after barge from Rotherhithe landed at Blackfriars the mud chalk and gravel which dredgers had scooped up in the lower reaches of the Thames. This ballast was carted direct to King Edward Street, passed through a machine which sorts the stones into various sizes, and then turned into liquid concrete by another wonderful machine which mixes sand, cement, and stones together at a rapid rate. The steel rods and bars interlacing one another extend in a network throughout the building like the skeleton of an animal, while the entire system is embedded in a perfectly connected sheath of concrete. The great feature in this system is the immense reduction in wall thickness. The effect is seen in the lightness and airy nature of the building; one's first impression is that it is certainly not built for eternity, as somebody said the granite structures of Aberdeen are.

But this is an illusion: the concrete increases in

strength as time goes on, and the passing years only make the building stronger and more capable of resisting weather and the strain of the loads which it has daily to carry.

Wattles and mud were the building materials of our remote ancestors, and it has been said that we are reverting to the old method, only British mud has given place to British concrete, concrete of Thames ballast and Portland cement. The outer walls are only 7 inches thick, but the frontages to King Edward Street and Newgate Street are faced with Portland stone with granite plinths. To see fully the effect of the reinforced concrete in building one has to examine the back elevations, where there are no stone facings. But even with its false but ornamental front the building has nothing of "the solemn and spacious Greek charm of the delightful old front in St. Martin's le Grand." The Post Office gains in spaciousness and utility what it loses in architectural beauty.

The building consists at present of two parts, a block facing King Edward Street which contains, on the ground floor, the new Public Office, and on the four upper floors the offices of the Controller of the London Postal Service. The other is a much larger block containing the main sorting offices both for foreign and colonial correspondence, and for the E.C. or City district.

The actual foundation is only 3 feet in depth, and not one of the floors is more than $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches in thickness.

Between the two blocks is a loading and unloading yard for the mails, and on the west side of the second block is a large yard and unoccupied space left for such future additions as may be required for growth of work. The Post Office is learning from experience

the value of the margin, and that there is no finality in its advances. It is in this open space below the level of the ground where is to be found the section of the Roman wall which I have described.

The public office is the central office in London for the transaction by the public of all classes of postal and telegraphic business. It is the largest public post office in the country, and measures 152 feet by 52 feet, with a counter running the whole length. The inside walls are lined throughout with marble; a green Irish marble being used for the dado, pilasters, panels, door architraves, and the front of the counter, and a light Italian marble for the remainder. The pilasters and piers have bases and capitals of bronze, and bronze is also used for the counter edges, table edges, and electric light fittings.

All this is unaccustomed magnificence for a London post office, and he must be a man singularly deficient in a sense of the fitness of things who can enter these marble halls and boldly go up to the bronze-edged counter and ask for a halfpenny stamp.

Under the public office is the posting room, into which falls the correspondence posted in the big letter-boxes by the public. It is interesting to stand in this room and watch the postal packets pouring down the shoot from the letter-boxes. There begins the first stage of the travels of a letter. Everything that machinery and science can do to economise labour and to facilitate delivery and despatch is brought into play. Sorting is simply continual subdivision, and it is interesting to watch the journeyings of the letters from the moment of posting in the big letter-box. There is very little carriage from one place to another by hand. Cable conveyors and band conveyors, worked much on the same principle as the moving platforms we have all

seen at exhibitions and great emporiums, carry the letters from point to point until each letter finds its appointed bag, and is either taken out of the building by the City postman or deposited in a mail cart which takes it to the railway station or district office.

A band conveyor takes the letters from the posting room which are addressed to places in London or abroad, to the ground floor of the building in baskets, and the empty baskets are sent down by a return band. The correspondence for the provinces, which is dealt with at a large sorting office at Mount Pleasant, nearly a mile away, is put into bags, and another band conveyor takes these bags to the departure platform at the west end of the sorting office. There is a third band conveyor suspended from the ceiling of the same floor, which is for the conveyance of bags of mails from the east to the west of the sorting office.

The London letters and those for abroad are conveyed to the ground floor, which is occupied by the E.C. district sorting office. The letters are brought to the eastern end of the immense room and with them are bags of letters which have arrived from provincial offices and abroad, amounting altogether to upwards of five millions weekly.

The posted letters are arranged in order for stamping on what are called facing tables, on which running bands are placed, and at the end of these tables are electric stamping machines which can obliterate the stamps on the letters up to a rate of 700 or 800 per minute. Then the letters pass into two main divisions. On the nothern side correspondence for all parts of London, except the E.C. district, is dealt with, and direct despatches are made to every chief district and sub-district delivery office in London for every delivery during the day. On the southern side the postmen pre-

pare the correspondence for the twelve daily deliveries in the E.C. district. Upwards of 1400 postmen are attached to this office. A noticeable feature of the work of sorting is that the letters travel from east to west always, and at the west end is the platform from which bags for other offices are despatched.

The first floor is entirely devoted to the treatment of correspondence for the Colonies and abroad. About 900 officers of all grades are employed upon the work and about 400,000 articles are despatched weekly. The work is brought up by lifts from the eastern platform.

The principle here is also continual subdivision, and there are upwards of 1000 different post offices for which direct bags are made up nightly in the Foreign Section. A striking feature of this section to the visitor is the varied colouring of the big mail bags intended for over-sea mails. If the foreign sailor cannot read he can appreciate colour, and he will know the destination of a mail bag by its colour.

A band conveyor from east to west conveys the bags from the Foreign Section to the top of a special shoot at the west end of the building, whence they are shot down to the departure platform on the ground floor.

All the letters everywhere are "stepping westward," and everything goes even on the busiest night with something like the regularity of clock work.

An interesting feature of the Sorting Office is the Blind Section. Here at all hours of the day you will find a row of men sitting at a long table over which is a bookshelf full of up-to-date directories, guides, and other manuals of topographical information. These men are doing their best to put in the way of delivery the imperfectly and indistinctly written packets. If they fail the letter goes to the Returned Letter Office to submit to more expert treatment. Experience counts



Photo *Clarke & Hyde.*

THE BLIND SECTION.

These men are dealing with badly and insufficiently addressed letters. They have directories in front of them, and every effort is made to put the letters into circulation again.

for much with these men. The badly spelt addresses are perhaps the easiest of these puzzles. "Saintlings, Hilewite," is at once decided to be "St. Helens, Isle of Wight." "Has bedallar—such" even a schoolboy would recognise as Ashby-de-la-Zouch; but it requires the specialist in puzzles addresses to arrange for the delivery of a letter addressed simply as 25th March to Lady Day, the wife of the judge of that name.

Whenever we speak of the activities of London we have to deal with big figures, and comparative tables of growth and development are a little wearisome to the modern reader, simply because they have lost all the charm of unexpectedness. We know there must be a huge staff employed at the Head Office in London; the statement that 20,000 is the actual number leaves us unaffected: perhaps even we guessed it was 40,000. We are fully prepared to hear that billions of letters are delivered in the City of London weekly; we are even a little disappointed when we know that up to the present the average is about 5½ millions. If we have been interested in the new building itself and what it is expected to bear in the way of work, we may at least like to know that the total weight of the weekly correspondence passing through its walls is about 366 tons.

I expect that if we were asked in a newspaper competition to state how many post offices and posting receptacles there were in London, we should make a wild guess and say perhaps 15,000 or even 20,000. The actual number is 4650. The fact is the average human mind is incapable of realising facts when stated in thousands. Only very experienced men can tell the approximate numbers at a Hyde Park meeting or a royal procession. Post office numbers are bewildering; we simply cannot realise that they are human life expressed in terms of figures. In order to help our

limited human faculties, Mr. J. Holt Schooling has estimated that if one man were given the task of sorting all the postal packets delivered in the United Kingdom in one year—and supposing him to work at the rate of sixty a minute—he would have had to begin nearly one hundred and sixty years ago, in the reign of George II., before the conquest of India began under Lord Clive, in order to complete his task by the year 1910. Mr. Schooling gives him no time for sleep or meals; he goes on without stopping. This is indeed harder to realise than the actual number of the postal packets, which is something over 5,000,000,000.

It is perhaps interesting to know that 32 per 100 of all letters delivered in England and Wales are proper to the London district, nearly one-third. The outgoing letters from the London district also show somewhat similar results. A City firm has posted as many as 132,000 letters at one time.

It is also an interesting fact that we send out of this country a great many more letters than we receive from all the five continents. Even in the case of America, the excess is something like 80,000, but one portion of America, viz., the United States, sends us more letters than we send to that country.

The following estimate will not perhaps test severely the brains which rebel at large sums. According to Mr. Schooling, whom we have quoted before, the number of letters, post cards, halfpenny packets, and newspapers delivered during a year in this country works out for each individual as 65 letters, 19 post cards, 21 halfpenny packets, and 4 newspapers. A moment's consideration of these figures will convince us of the vast number of folk still living with whom the receipt of a letter must be an event in the year.

It is only a little over eighty years since the com-

paratively small office at Lombard Street housed the whole staff of the London chief office. The change has been tremendous, but no more in proportion to the population than other activities of life. Post Office servants often point with pride to what their Department has achieved, but the truth must be told, and it is that the credit cannot be claimed by the officials. We might almost say that, as far as the Department is concerned, the increase is mostly unearned increment. The increase in population, and especially the advance in the means of communication, are the two chief causes; it is the people who have made the Post Office, not the officials. A retiring postmaster, or even a retiring Postmaster-General, will sometimes tell us in round figures what has been accomplished under his rule. "Alone I did it" is sometimes the burden of these valedictory speeches. But the true explanation lies often in the birth-rate or in the opening of a new railway, and the Post Office reaps what others have sown. And there have been times when the Post Office administrator, proud of what he has done and what his Department is doing, has tried to say "Thus far shalt thou go and no further" to the reformers. "Why not remain satisfied with the perfection I have been the humble means of securing?" The official mind usually requires some driving force from outside before it can see the necessity for another advance.

Still, do not let us forget the huge army which serves the nation in postal matters. The counter-clerk who sells the stamp and the postman who delivers the letter are the two officials who are known to the public, and the different officers who conduct the operations which come between the buying of the stamp and the delivery of the letter are almost unknown outside the

walls of their own offices. And it is a matter for congratulation that in King Edward's Building the health and bodily needs of the staff have been considered in a way which twenty or thirty years ago would have been regarded as quixotic and as grandmotherly administration.

Ducts have been provided in the main building for mechanically ventilating the three lower floors, and uptakes are led from these into fan-houses situated on the roof. The fans which have been installed are directly coupled to motors of variable speed, and are designed to move large quantities of air. Fresh air is admitted through windows and ventilating radiators, and the vitiated air is discharged on the roof. The ventilation of the Bag Room has been separately treated; here a considerable quantity of dust is liberated by the handling of mail bags, and dust, we are beginning to learn, is the great enemy to health. Arrangements have been made for concentrating this at one point near a collecting hopper, through which the dust-laden air passes and is discharged on the roof.

The third floor is entirely devoted to kitchen and refreshment-room accommodation and retiring-rooms for the various classes of the staff. Each officer has a long locker for his belongings. As the work goes on during the whole of the twenty-four hours, the refreshment branch is practically always open. A very large business is done here. Three thousand dinners can be prepared every day.

The roof is flat, and on it two miniature rifle ranges, one of 25 yards and one of 50 yards, have been constructed. Here are to be seen the large ventilating fans for securing a constant supply of fresh air to the rooms below.

The new-comer into the service speedily takes all these conveniences and comforts for granted, and perhaps is aggrieved because arm-chairs and lounges are not yet provided; but the middle-aged official, who remembers times when nothing apart from his work was ever considered by his chiefs, rubs his eyes sometimes and wonders whether it is all a dream.

King Edward's Building is in keeping with all the traditions of the City of London. Charlotte Brontë in *Villette* says: "I have seen the West End, the parks, the fine squares: but I love the City far better. The City seems so much more in earnest: its business, its rush, its roar are such serious things, sights, sounds. The City is getting its living—the West End but enjoying its pleasure. At the West End you may be amused, but in the City you are deeply excited." That is the mood which will possess the visitor as he leaves the new building.

Here is a list of the huge buildings which now make up the London General Post Office :—

1. G.P.O. North. For the Postmaster-General and the offices of the Secretary, Accountant-General, and Solicitor.
2. G.P.O. West. For the Central Telegraph Office and Engineering Staff.
3. G.P.O. South (Queen Victoria Street). For the Telephone Department.
4. King Edward's Building. For the Controller of the London Postal Service and his staff and for the E.C. and Foreign Sections of the Sorting Office.
5. Mount Pleasant. For the Inland Letter and Parcel Sections of the Sorting Office, Returned Letter Office, Telegraph Factories, &c.

King Edward's Building

6. West Kensington. For the Post Office Savings Bank.
7. Studd Street, N. For the Stores Department.
8. Holloway, N. For Money Order and Postal Order Departments.

The staff working in these eight buildings is about 20,000, of whom 4300 are in King Edward's Building.

CHAPTER V

THE TRAVELLING POST OFFICE

SOMETHING of the old romance of the service lingers about the Travelling Post Office. To those who work it there is always a possibility of adventure, not to mention the risk to life and limb, while to those who watch its operations there is that indefinable element which makes an appeal to the imagination. Moreover, in more than one of its features it links up our time with the old mail coach days. There are pictures in existence of the mail coach passing through a village or hamlet, and the mail bag is being handed out from the upper windows of the local post office to the guard of the coach. The driver is reducing his speed while the exchange is taking place, and the suggestion of the picture is that no time is to be lost. The same idea is carried out to-day by means of mechanical appliances. Indeed, so soon as the mail train came into being, the minds of officials were at once exercised how to maintain the old system of exchange under altered conditions. The early effects were scarcely ingenious, and were obviously dangerous. The experiment was tried of hoisting up the bags towards the railway guards on long poles, but after one guard had had his eye poked out, and others had suffered from severe falls while endeavouring to secure the bags, it was felt that the business placed too severe a strain on human endeavour. Under this clumsy arrangement it was necessary for the train

to reduce its speed, and it was not only, I am afraid, to preserve the guards from injury, but also to prevent delay during the process of exchange, that the efforts of inventors were directed. But before I proceed to describe the ingenious apparatus which is in operation to-day, and which is on practically the same lines as that invented more than seventy years ago, I must deal with the Travelling Post Office itself.

As early as 1837, when railways were yet in their infancy, it was suggested to the Post Office by Frederick Karstadt, a son of one of the surveyors of the Department, that much time would be saved if some of the necessary business of sorting and preparation for delivery of letters were performed on the train. On the 6th January 1838, a carriage was run as an experiment on the railway between Birmingham and Liverpool. The carriage used for the purpose was simply a horse-box temporarily fitted up as a sorting office. The experiment was decided to be a success, not only by officials, but by the press and the public. In the words of an enthusiastic writer at the time, "Here is a specimen of the exhaustless ingenuity which bids fair to annihilate time and space, an improvement which enables the Post Office to work practically double tides—in other words, to duplicate time by travelling and working at the same instant." We smile at writing of this kind in these days, when the familiarity of the operations has robbed us of all sense of wonder but the language is not very different from what we frequently hear to-day when the achievements of the aeroplane or wireless telegraphy are recorded. To our grandfathers the Travelling Post Office was a miracle of the d and it is not difficult, if we know the



Photo *Herbert Lazenby.*

THE TRAVELLING POST OFFICE.

This is the interior of the most recently constructed Great Northern Railway travelling post office. Notice the exchange apparatus fittings behind the sorters.

that time, to understand the way in which they must have speculated on its possibilities.

It was the idea of being able to carry on the ordinary business of life while travelling from one place to another which appealed to the imaginations of men whose experiences of travel had been limited to the cramped conditions of the mail coach. But I doubt whether they could have conceived of a time when we should breakfast, lunch, dine, and have comfortable beds on trains running at fifty miles an hour. And one of the latest developments of all, the providing of lady typists on trains for the benefit of business men travelling to and from London, would certainly have justified the enthusiastic prose of an earlier day. We take these things in a more complacent fashion; we talk of the increased economy and convenience as meeting a public demand, and we grumble at the railway which withholds luxuries from us.

There is no doubt, however, that the success of the Travelling Post Office was the first revelation to the railway companies, and to the public, of what could be done on a train while in motion, but much was needed in the direction of improving the permanent way and the springs and general make-up of the rolling stock before any further advances could take place. Perhaps on this ground alone we can spare a little sympathy for the Post Office servants, who during the long years when railway travelling was neither smooth nor comfortable, had to keep their heads and their feet while the train raced across country.

The first permanent sorting carriage was built by the Grand Junction Railway Company, and this carriage was fitted with an apparatus for exchanging mail bags *en route*. The appliance consisted of an iron frame

covered with netting, and was fixed to the near side of the carriage. It was made to open out for the purpose of receiving a bag suspended from the arm of a standard erected beside the railway line. Simultaneously with the delivery of a bag into the carriage net, a bag was dropped on to the bare ground by another mechanical contrivance, guard boards being fixed by the side of the permanent way to prevent the bag from getting under the wheels of the carriage. This apparatus was first tried in 1838 on the London and Birmingham Railway at Boxmoor. On the 17th September 1838, the London and Birmingham Railway was opened throughout its entire length, and the Travelling Post Office was permanently established on that line. Two mails were despatched from Euston daily, the first a day mail at 11 A.M. and the *night* mail at 8.30 P.M.

The immediate effect of the introduction of the Travelling Post Office was to render unnecessary the making up of some 800 or 900 bags. Each town now made up one bag for the train, instead of the fourteen or fifteen which had to be made up for the mail coach, and the Travelling Post Office re-sorted the letters and made up bags for the various towns which it served. In the year 1843 the number of bags made up in the London and Preston Travelling Post Office down mail was 51 and in the up mail 44. The number of bags at present made up in the same Travelling Post Office, which now runs from London to Aberdeen, is nearly 400 on the down journey and about 300 on the up journey. In 1910 there were in Great Britain no less than 73 separate Travelling Post Offices, composed of 150 specially constructed carriages.

In 1848 the apparatus for exchanging letters was considerably altered and simplified. For the first time

nets were fixed by the side of the permanent way in which were caught the bags delivered from the Travelling Post Office, and a new variety of winged carriage net was provided with detaching lines, which were used to grip and detach the pouch from the arm in which it was held. Many alterations have since been made in the working of this apparatus, but the principle of the thing remains the same.

In 1859 as a further means of accelerating the mails "the limited mail" train was started. Many people have doubtless wondered at this definition of an express train: they have probably connected it in some way with the idea of speed, but in reality it was nothing more than the application of the old regulation of the mail coach days to railway traffic. That is to say, the mails were to be the first consideration, and the passenger traffic was to be limited on these trains to the point where the speed or the availability of the train for mail purposes would not be interfered with. The first limited mail to run was the night train to Scotland.

An advance on the idea of the limited mail was made in 1885, when a special mail train was established on the London and North-Western and Caledonian Railways. This is a train devoted entirely to the mail service, and it runs in both directions between London and Aberdeen. Similar special trains run on the Great Western Railway between London and Penzance. One of the latest developments of the system is the provision of a late-fee box on the side of the carriage. The letter-box on the side of the carriage next to the platform is kept open while the train is standing in a station. The up-to-date sorting carriages are an immense improvement on those of the old pattern in the matter of easy movement. They are constructed

with a view to reduce vibration to a minimum. All projections and angles are well padded, and this precaution is at all times necessary, as turning a curve at high speed frequently takes the sorters off their feet and sends them flying into corners or against the sides of the carriage.

In the new sorting carriages plate-glass bottoms are provided for the letter-sorting frames to enable the sorters to see at a glance that they have removed all the correspondence from each box at the time of despatch. This prevents letters being carried beyond their destination or left in the carriage at the journey's end.

The duty of each officer is laid down in detail in the "duty book," as is also "the plan" or "alphabet" he is to use in sorting the correspondence, and the order in which the bags are to be hung. Every man knows exactly what he has to do, and that he must depend upon his own exertions for the completion of his duty over every stage of the journey. Space is necessarily limited. Along one side of the letter-vans are pigeon-holes for sorting purposes, while the opposite side is fitted with pegs for holding the bags and with the machinery used for the exchange apparatus.

Upwards of 3,000,000 miles are run annually by Travelling Post Offices in this country. The largest number are run on the London and North-Western and Caledonian Railways, amounting in all to 1,800,000 miles. The London night mail is the heaviest mail in the course of the twenty-four hours. Day mails and mid-day mails are merely subsidiaries to the larger service. It has been said that "the principal mail train in the kingdom, perhaps in the whole world, is the Down Postal Express which leaves Euston every night at 8.30." It consists entirely of postal vehicles,

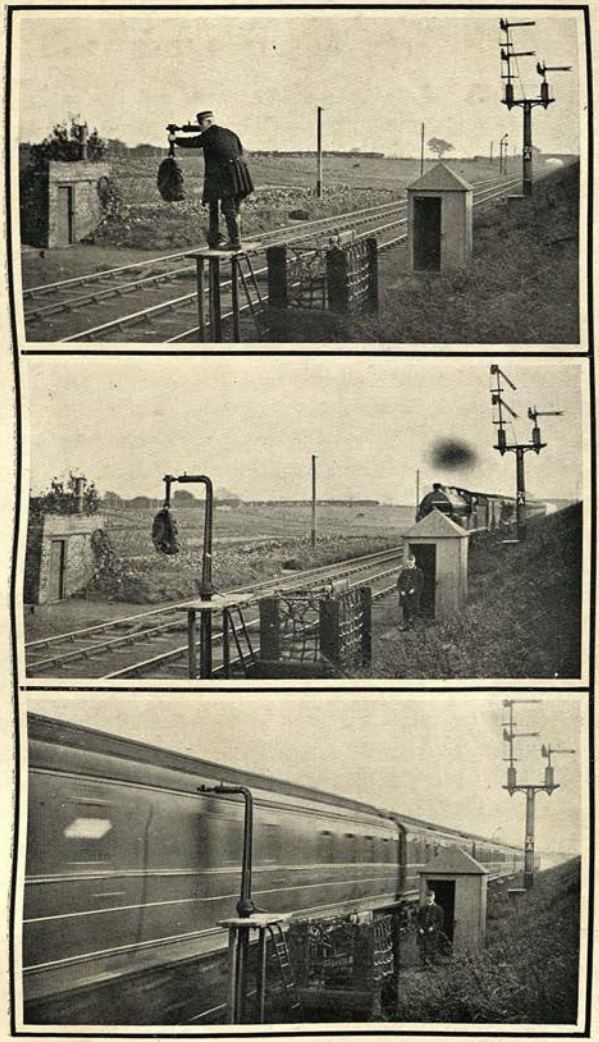
and carries thirty Post Office officials, the only representatives of the railway company being the driver, fireman, and guard. At Tamworth connection is made with the Midland Travelling Post Office going north and south and with the Lincoln sorting carriage. At Carlisle the Caledonian Railway takes on the running. The London officers are relieved here, and Glasgow and Edinburgh sorters take over the carriages journeying to these cities. At Perth the train is on the Highland Railway system, and has a direct run to Aberdeen. At most important points on the road it connects with cross-country routes.

The Great Western Railway has a similar train which leaves Paddington at 9.5 P.M. and is due at Penzance at 6.45 A.M. The mail is divided for sorting purposes into five divisions, the fifth being known as the Cornwall Section. At Reading a large number of bags are exchanged for the South and Midlands. The London and South-Western Travelling Post Office is connected here with the Paddington mail.

Travelling Post Offices are attached to the night trains on other lines from London, and these trains also carry passengers. At 9.13 P.M. there is a carriage from London Bridge for Brighton and south coast towns. The Great Eastern trains leaving Liverpool Street for Ipswich and Norwich at 8.50 P.M. and 10.7 P.M. have sorting carriages attached to them. The continental night mail leaves Cannon Street at 9.5 P.M., and is followed at 10 P.M. by the South-Eastern Travelling Post Office. There is also a night mail between Holborn Viaduct and Folkestone in connection with the Flushing route to the Continent.

The working of the mail bag exchange apparatus is perhaps to the public the most interesting feature in the Travelling Post Office. I make no apology, therefore,

in giving a detailed description of the contrivance. The net is made of hemp, the end of which is strengthened by stout manilla rope in order to enable it better to withstand the shock subsequent upon the receipt of the pouches. The iron frame of the net is hinged in two pieces, called the bed and the wing. When extended for use the net is about two feet seven inches from the panel of the carriage, and the apex of the wing some nine feet eight inches above rail level. When not in use the net pulls up nearly flat against the side of the carriage, and it is lowered into position and raised again by the action of a lever inside the carriage. The delivery arms are fitted in the doorways of the carriage, and are hinged to strong iron tubes containing spiral springs which, when the arms are not required for use, retain them in an upright position by the door pillars. When a despatch has to be made the arm is drawn into the carriage, a sort of convex shield, technically called "a sweep," determining the angle to which it must be brought before it can be drawn from its perpendicular position. The mail bags for delivery are enclosed in a leather pouch for protection against concussion, and to keep them in a fairly square position when suspended. Affixed to the pouch is a thick strap about ten inches long, known as a "drop strap," and at one end of this there is an eyelet which, when the arm is drawn into the carriage, is passed on to a pin forming a portion of the head or box of the arm, which is protected by a spring cover. The carriage net has to be lowered and the pouches put out for delivery some distance before the roadside apparatus is reached, and in order to perform these operations properly an officer has to be well acquainted with the different landmarks along the permanent way. All sorts of immovable marks serve for this purpose—houses, churches, bridges, gates,



Photos by *Herbert Lazenby.*

THE TRAVELLING POST OFFICE.

(1) The official placing the suspended pouch in position to be taken up by the passing train.

(2) The pouch suspended and the net open to receive the pouch from the approaching train.

(3) The pouch has been received into the travelling post office by means of the net attached to it, while the one received from the train is seen in the wayside net.

and clumps of trees. There is a tale told of a white horse which was seen so regularly every day in a field beside the railway that the animal became a mark for the official working the apparatus. One day the horse died, and there were then several bag failures at the particular station.

The work of the officer in charge has to be done in less than twenty seconds, when the train is going fifty or sixty miles an hour ; in this time he has to lower two pouches, extend the net, and raise it again after the receipt of the pouch.

The roadside receiving apparatus is made up of a net of stout manilla rope attached to a framing which consists of a fixed wooden upright and a hinged iron frame. Both stand up some four feet above the rail level, and when in position are kept apart by a cross-bar. To this bar the angle end of a double piece of rope is fastened by means of straps, and the other ends of the rope are attached, one to the top of the fixed wooden framing and one to the top of the iron frame, forming a V. This is struck by the drop strap of the pouch suspended from the delivery arm of the carriage, and the pouch itself is released, not the net. The weight of a single pouch, including the bags which it protects, must not exceed 50 lbs. when despatched from a roadside standard, or 60 lbs. when despatched from a carriage arm. The man stationed at the roadside apparatus has to be as alert and careful as the man on the train, and considering the delicate nature of the work it is wonderful how few misses or accidents occur. Parcels are, of course, never exchanged in this way.

The blow sustained by the pouch containing the mail bags at the moment of delivery when the train is travelling at high speed is exceedingly severe, and

sometimes causes danger to postal packets of a fragile nature. This explains the following complaint from a member of the public: "I am sorry to return the bracelet to be repaired. It came this morning with the box smashed, the bracelet bent, and one of the cairngorms forced out. Among the modern improvements of the Post Office appears to be the introduction of sledge-hammers to stamp with." But this sort of thing seldom happens. Occasionally, however, the pouches miss the nets and are sent bounding over hedges. Bags have been found at the end of a journey hanging on to a buffer or on the carriage roof. On one occasion, at least, the apparatus has been the means of perhaps saving life. A lamplighter was carried away on the roof of a compartment, and after he had travelled twenty miles in this uncomfortable fashion it occurred to him to knock on the roof-light of the Travelling Post Office. The net was at once lowered, and the man obtained access to the interior of the carriage.

One of the most curious accidents recorded was that which happened to an engine driver who climbed out on to his foot-plate on a dark night to oil his engine. He had forgotten he was near an apparatus station, and was struck violently against the net. He was in a second hurled into it, and the mail bag from his own train came banging in on top of him. He was badly hurt, while the man at the apparatus station must have received a severe mental shock at the delivery of a *male* which he had not expected that night.

The history of the Travelling Post Office is not without its stories of more serious disasters. One of the most awful railway accidents which have happened in this country was the collision of the Irish

mail train with some runaway waggons at Abergele on the 20th August 1868. There were barrels of petroleum on the waggons, and these became ignited, setting fire to the train. Among the burning carriages was the Travelling Post Office, and the two officers working in it were seriously injured. The conduct of Woodroffe, one of the two, whose injuries were not so severe as those of his colleague, was in accordance with the best traditions of the postal service. Woodroffe, though badly hurt, carried his brother officer, who was insensible from the collision, to the side of the railway line, and after laying him there proceeded himself to save the mails so far as it was possible.

Another railway tragedy which will long be remembered in the postal service was that which took place outside Shrewsbury Station on the 15th October 1907. This was the severest accident that has occurred in the whole history of the Travelling Post Office. No less than three Post Office men were killed while on duty, and others were injured.

It will be perhaps interesting at this stage to trace the travels of a letter to the furthest point in the British Isles. On this route we can bring out clearly the fact that in many parts of Great Britain and Ireland the Post Office, in spite of mail trains and ingenious mechanical contrivances, is still dependent on quite primitive means for conducting its business. Moreover, directly we get away from the main lines of traffic, considerations of weather still affect postal operations almost as much as they used to do in the old coaching days. Let us address a letter to the Muckle Flugga Lighthouse, which is situated to the north of the island of Unst in Shetland. Let us post the letter at King Edward's Building on a Sunday night at 6 P.M., and given favourable conditions of

weather it will be delivered at the Muckle Flugga Lighthouse on Thursday morning. The letter is sorted into the Scottish division, is subsorted into a pigeon hole, and afterwards into a bundle labelled "Aberdeen forward." The bundle is dropped into a bag inscribed with the words "London to Aberdeen," and one of the familiar red vans conveys the bag to the London terminus. On Sunday nights this would be Euston. The bag is handed over to the sorters in charge of the Travelling Post Office, on which there is a mail carriage which runs direct to Aberdeen. Aberdeen is reached at 7.35 on Monday morning. So far the process of the letter has been simple and rapid.

The bag containing the letters is conveyed to the Aberdeen Post Office, where it is opened, and the letters are again subsorted. The letter for Muckle Flugga is placed in a pigeon hole labelled "Lerwick," and a sorter then checks all the postal packets very carefully, because, in consequence of the remoteness of the islands, serious delay would happen if any were mis-sent. Then they are tied in separate bundles and are placed in a strong waterproof sack labelled "Lerwick." The Monday steamer goes to Scalloway on the west side of Shetland, other steamers during the week go to Lerwick *via* Orkney, the steamer on Thursdays from Aberdeen sailing to Lerwick direct. But our letter is going to Scalloway, and it can arrive there about 2 P.M. on the Tuesday. The mails are then placed on a mail cart for conveyance to Lerwick on the east side of the island, six miles distant. At Lerwick the letter is again subsorted, and placed in another bag labelled "Lerwick to Haroldswick." This place is on the island of Unst. The bag is conveyed by mail car leaving Lerwick at 9.15 P.M. on Tuesday, and this stage means a long drive

of many miles north, with a break of a few hours at Voe. Mossbank, which is on Yell Sound, the dangerous channel which separates the island of Yell from the Shetland mainland, is reached at 7.30 A.M. on Wednesday. The bag for Haroldswick is here placed in a ferry-boat which starts at 8 A.M. and is due to reach the other side in an hour, the distance being three miles. The tide in Yell Sound has a speed of nine miles an hour, and in a gale of wind is the worst crossing in the British Isles. Ulsta is the landing-place on the other side, and a mail car takes the letter for the lighthouse five and a half miles to Burravoe, then another car takes it to Cullivoe, twenty miles further on, and the letter is opposite the island of Unst at 3 P.M. on Wednesday. Here is another ferry between the islands of Yell and Unst, across a channel one mile in width, and the ferryman should arrive at Tranavoe in Unst about 3.30 P.M. There a mail car takes the letter, and carries it eleven and a half miles across the island, and it arrives at Haroldswick the same evening at 6.30. Here the letter rests until the following morning, when a foot-postman starts for the shore station of the Muckle Flugga Lighthouse. But it may be here for weeks before the people on the shore can communicate with those on the lighthouse. The British Isles in these northern latitudes end in magnificent and dangerous rocks, and it is upon one of these, rising to a height of 200 feet, that the Muckle Flugga lighthouse is erected.

The letter has travelled practically the length of the British Isles from south to north, and in less than the same time another letter might have travelled from London to Athens, Cadiz, Gibraltar, Madeira or Tangiers. The *Mauretania* will probably reach New York on most of her voyages sooner than a passenger will travel the length of the British Isles. And that

is simply because we use the old means of conveyance over a considerable portion of the distance. The Post Office owes much to the railway companies for the advances made in the quality of the rolling stock and in the condition of the permanent way. It was always possible to sort letters after a fashion while the train was in motion. But it is now possible to write and to type letters on the train, and we have come to this, that all the stages of a letter can be completed during a single journey. Yet directly we get away from the railway system in any part of the country we are back again in the eighteenth century, dependent on postboys, mail carts, the weather, and the state of the roads. The country is still full of samples of the travelling arrangements of all the centuries. There is no Travelling Post Office in the Hebrides or the Shetlands.

CHAPTER VI

THE PARCEL POST

OUT of very small beginnings many great commercial enterprises have arisen, and the Parcel Post is not the only big business which sprang into being in a cellar. In the basement of the old General Post Office at St. Martin's le Grand in the year 1883 the Parcel Post began its work, and though it speedily outgrew this limited accommodation, not even the most optimistic of its supporters could have dreamed that in less than thirty years the General Post Office would be dealing annually with 118 million parcels, and that instead of a basement, many great buildings would be required in which to transact the business.

In 1880 a Postal Conference was held at Paris with the view of creating an International Parcel Post, and at that Conference the British Post Office was represented, although, having then no Inland Parcel Post, it was unable to enter into any international agreement. But the example of foreign nations undoubtedly stimulated the energies of English officials, and in the two following years negotiations were carried on with the railway companies which finally resulted in an arrangement, to which legal effect was given by an Act of Parliament passed on the 18th August 1882, that the companies should receive eleven-twentieths of the postage collected upon all parcels carried by railway. It was from the outset intended to link the Inland to the International Parcel Post as soon as might be possible.

The Parcel Post

In the early days no parcel weighing over 7 lbs. could be sent by Parcel Post, and the charge for a parcel of this weight was 1s. To-day a 7 lb. parcel can be sent for 7d., and parcels weighing up to 11 lbs. are accepted. The charge for 11 lbs. is now 11d. The reduction in charges was a part of the Diamond Jubilee Reforms of 1897. The minimum charge of 3d. for a parcel not weighing over 1 lb. has remained unchanged since 1883.

The dimensions of a parcel must not exceed 3 feet 6 inches in length nor a total of 6 feet in length and girth combined. Ladies' hats are sent by the Parcel Post in large numbers, and grave fears were at one time entertained, when the hats were growing larger week by week, that the General Post Office would have to close its doors to these enormities. They were approaching perilously near the limit of 6 feet length and girth combined. It is difficult at all times to find out what determines a change of fashion; it is possible in this instance that the Parcel Post regulations may have influenced those mysterious individuals who decide what ladies are to wear; anyhow, the situation was saved by the introduction of "the pudding basin" hat, and though the large hat did not disappear, high tide in size had been reached.

In its early beginnings the Parcel Post was confined to the United Kingdom, but in 1885 it was extended to some of the Colonies and British dependencies, to India, Gibraltar and Egypt, to Malta, the Straits Settlements, Hong Kong, some of the West Indies, and South Africa. In the following year business was begun with Germany. Belgium, and Constantinople, and other continental countries were soon added to those we exchanged parcels with. Canada joined the system also in 1886, These foreign extensions were not always considered

successes by the public. An indignant business man, complaining of the loss of parcels sent by him to Persia, wrote: "The Parcel Post Service was evidently established in Persia with the object of providing the officials of that country with food and clothing. The only articles which appear to reach their destination are the publications of the Religious Tract Society."

We are accustomed to see in the windows of suburban houses cards bearing the letters C.P. or L.P.D., indicating that the carts of certain carrying agencies are required to call, but we should probably experience something in the nature of a shock if we saw in the windows a card lettered P.P. or G.R. to indicate that the Parcel Postman was to call. There is an accepted tradition with the public as well as with officials that the Post Office does not advertise. Mr. Fawcett was Postmaster-General when the Parcel Post was organised, and he broke through that tradition not only as regards the Parcel Post but also in dealing with the Post Office Savings Bank; and in the early days of the Parcel Post, cards were distributed to householders with the request that they should be placed in the windows when the Parcel Post cart was required to call. The cards were coloured with the Post Office red, and the lettering was white.

The chief Parcel Office is at Mount Pleasant, Clerkenwell. It is a district rich in historical associations. Here was the famous Bagnigge Wells, where Londoners used to stroll on summer evenings to drink a dish of tea and to enjoy the humours and fashions of the town. Here also stood the Coldbath Fields Prison, and gradually, as buildings surrounded the jail, the district lost prestige as a health resort. The prison authorities doubtless realised this, and decided to seek purer air for their 2000 visitors, and they removed their headquarters

further into the country. The prison was thus thrown on the market, and after a period of negotiations the General Post Office took possession with the intention of erecting a pile of Government buildings on the site. The Parcel Post had rapidly outgrown its cramped quarters at St. Martin's le Grand, and in 1887 the business was transferred to the prison buildings. For some years the chief Parcel Sorting Office in Great Britain was located in the old prison treadwheel house behind massive and gloomy walls. The khaki-clad, barefaced gentry had departed to their country residence, and the huge treadwheels had been removed to make way for the Parcel Post.

But the prison was very quickly demolished and gave way to a handsome Sorting Office, the floor space of which when completed was to cover two acres. The Parcel Post took possession of the new building in October 1892. It is always difficult to transact any business in a building constructed for quite another purpose, and the conditions of service in the prison buildings had not been exactly comfortable. Spacious yards surround the Post Office buildings, and in these yards platforms have been built giving direct access to the Sorting Office. Post Office vans arrive in one yard loaded with receptacles containing parcels collected from post offices in the City and other parts of London, or sent up from the provinces and brought here from the railway termini. The loads are discharged on to the platform and conveyed by porters into the Sorting Office. In another yard on the opposite side of the building other vans arrive empty, and back up to the platform to receive their loads of parcels for conveyance to other parts of London or to railway stations for despatch to provincial towns.

In the early days the parcels were chiefly packed in

wicker hampers with heavy fastenings, but the weight and cost of these receptacles rendered it necessary to find something lighter. Many experiments were made, and at last a receptacle was adopted with a wicker body and a canvas top, which required no metal fastenings, as the canvas top was tied with string and sealed with wax. The latest improvement on this is the substitution of a leaden seal for the old wax sealing. Even this much lighter receptacle is considered too heavy and costly for the conveyance of ordinary parcels, and canvas sacks of extra durability are now being generally used for the conveyance of parcels across London and to and from provincial towns. Parcels of a fragile nature when sent by railway are still packed in wicker receptacles for greater security.

The public are advised to affix a label marked "Fragile" to any parcel which requires more than ordinary care in handling, and from time to time wonderful examples of fragile parcels have been met with. A pair of boots wrapped in brown paper has been so described, so have a plum pudding in a cloth, a basket of fish, a box of butter, a volume of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, a York ham, an iron bolt wrapped in corrugated paper, and a roll of blankets.

Wicker receptacles are not suitable for the service with the Colonies: the parcels would not be sufficiently protected during the long voyage and railway journey. For this traffic parcels are packed in tightly fitting boxes unless the contents can safely be sent in sacks made of double canvas.

As the practice increased of packing parcels in canvas sacks rather than in wicker baskets, difficulties were experienced in finding supports for the sacks during the process of packing. Every schoolboy

knows that a basket stands on its own bottom, but an empty sack falls flat. Officials with a mechanical turn of mind vied with one another in suggesting how to evade or to get round this natural law—in other words, how to support the sacks—and eventually the Dockree support was chosen. This consists of four iron arms extended at right angles from a pedestal, each arm being constructed to support a sack at full length and with the mouth open. An improved pattern of this holder, capable of supporting eight open-mouthed sacks at one time, has recently been introduced. A sorter is thus able to sort into eight mouths at once without any of the stooping which was unavoidable when the sacks lay limp on the floor.

Let me now explain the system of sorting. The majority of people probably never give a thought as to the happenings of a parcel which they have posted: they leave it in faith on the counter and the wonderful Post Office sends it direct to its destination. That is probably their idea. Supposing you have left your parcel on the public counter of King Edward's Building, what happens next? The parcel is taken to the despatching room to wait the arrival of the van which will convey it in a sack to the Parcel Office at Mount Pleasant. It will there be turned out on a long sorting-table which has a sunken surface, after the fashion of a scullery sink, the well of which is lined with zinc. Your parcel is in the company of others, intended for all parts of the world, and the first step is to get the parcels to the various parts of the office from which they will be despatched to other destinations. Along the whole length of one side of the table is a wooden framework or sack holding the empty baskets. These ten baskets are labelled Scotch, Irish, Paddington, Foreign and Colonial, Delivery, Liverpool Street,

Euston, King's Cross, Waterloo and London Bridge, Town, and the sorters stand between these baskets and the table laden with parcels. They pick up the parcels from the table and place them in the respective baskets. Full baskets are carried by a porter to another part of the office, where the second stage of the sorting is to be gone through. Here the parcels are turned out on to another table similar to the one already described. Let us suppose that your parcel is in the basket labelled "Euston." There are twelve baskets on the sorting rack at the Euston division table, and they are labelled to the large centres known as "Roads" and also to the "Aylesbury Coach" and to "Blind" as follows: Chester, Carlisle, Preston, Rugby, Stafford, Blind, Watford, Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool, Shrewsbury, Aylesbury Branch.

Each of these centres or "Roads" contains a group of towns, and the Aylesbury Coach "Road" covers all places served by the coach. The basket labelled "Blind" is to receive all parcels which have reached the Euston division table in error, through having been mis-sorted at the first stage, and also any parcels which bear insufficient or doubtful addresses. The business of the sorter at this stage is to put the parcels on to the proper "Road," and unless he has thoroughly learnt not only the groups of towns on each "Road" but also the numerous smaller places subordinate to these towns, he will cause trouble at the third or final stage of the sorting. When these baskets are filled with parcels they are taken to their respective "Roads," and then the final process of making up the mails takes place. The sorter at "the Road" receives the basket of parcels proper to his centre, and then he sorts the parcels for the various towns included in his district. He may have as many as a dozen mails

to prepare for despatch within a few minutes of each other, and this means that he has to sort his parcels into twelve different receptacles. These are close round him, and the advantage to the sorter of having his sacks supported at full length will now be understood.

Any parcels which have been mis-sorted to the officer on "the Road" have to be placed on a shelf, and are subsequently returned to the sorting-table to be put into their proper channel. This means that they may miss their proper mail, and the importance of obtaining reliable men for the sorting of the second stage is great.

The sorter at "the Road," having packed his sacks or hampers, has to prepare a bill for each receptacle, and this bill, when filled up, is put in a pocket provided in the receptacle. The receptacle is then tied, sealed, and sent off. The bill gives particulars of the number of the receptacle, the offices of despatch and destination, the time of despatch, and also an account of any registered or valuable parcels which there may be in the mail. Registered parcels are not placed on the ordinary sorting-tables, but are treated individually from the moment they enter the Sorting Office to the time when they are packed ready for despatch. They are passed from hand to hand, and signed for at each transfer.

"Blind" parcels are those which are incorrectly or incompletely addressed. All such parcels have to be examined at comparative leisure, and the public would be surprised to learn what a large amount of time is spent by the Post Office in making good the many defects and shortcomings in addresses on parcels and other postal packets. The Parcel Post comes in for many kicks from the public, but in justice it must be said that the officials spare no pains to trace the proper

addresses of parcels. They exercise, too, great ingenuity in the task, and books of reference are in constant use. Bad spelling in addresses was formerly a very common source of trouble to sorters, but it is less noticeable now, and possibly this may be one of the results of universal education. I will give some instances of addresses of this kind which have been successfully dealt with by the Post Office staff :—

Sir lordmear of London manchouse	=	The Lord Mayor of London Mansion House
Mr. Rosenheim 21 Rus/elstreet Komerseldok	=	21 Russell Street Commercial Dock
Michael Kelly Little elfet Sir Nicolas Dusty School	=	St. Nicholas Industrial School Little Ilford
Tom Jenkins Haselbeach in no Jamtshere	=	Haselbeach Northamptonshire
Mr. Wallace Drapers Iobin	=	Messrs. Wallis & Co. Drapers High Holborn
Ferar & Son Obanvidock	=	H. B. Fearon & Son Holborn Viaduct

Then there are instances of extraordinary abbreviations in addresses. For instance :—

Messrs. CSSA Qvst	=	Civil Service Supply Association Queen Victoria Street

People, too, sometimes address their parcels with

word pictures instead of written characters, and of course the funny man who sends a parcel is also in evidence.

Messrs. Parsons & Co.
Cocks and Hens
London, E.,

which is obviously intended for Poultry, E.C.

Of insufficiently addressed parcels there are a great number, and the difficulties with these are not lessened by the number of towns bearing the same name. For instance, there are as many as 24 places in the United Kingdom alone bearing the name of Newton, 12 named Milton, 16 Middleton, 20 Newtown, 12 Newport, 9 Mount Pleasant, and so on.

The covers of some packages are embellished with drawings, pen-and-ink sketches, and even paintings, and the monotony of the sorter's duties is relieved, though when the address of the parcel is hidden among the foliage of a landscape or written in small characters on a boulder by the sea-shore his difficulties are not lessened.

Some years ago, before the Parcel Post was established, and when the difference between the book rate of postage and the letter rate was much greater than it is at present, a poor woman sent a pair of trousers through the post to her son, and paid only at the book rate. When the parcel was delivered, a heavy charge was demanded and paid. The woman then appealed to the Secretary, and a reply was sent explaining the regulations and pointing out that the Book Post was not intended for the transmission through the post of articles of clothing: this she would see if she consulted the Post Office Guide. The woman replied that she had consulted the Guide before despatching

the parcel, and had found that anything open at both ends could go by Book Post. She therefore asked for the return of the surcharge.

One Christmas parcel consisted of a hare stuffed with packets of tea, raisins, sweets, rashers of bacon, a roll of tobacco, a briar pipe, a small toothed comb, all wrapped in a red handkerchief. And here is another instance from a provincial Parcel Post Hospital. A flimsy hat-box with the lid secured by tape. From it flows a thick and viscid stream of egg yolk and albumen. When opened it reveals a silk top hat, inside which is packed a damp goose, the spaces between the goose and the lining of the hat being packed with eggs. This parcel had travelled by coach, steamer, and rail *via* Holyhead to Leeds!

Bad packing, indeed, on the part of senders of parcels causes an infinity of trouble. Only three days after the establishment of the Parcel Post in 1883 the Post Office found it necessary to issue notices to the public throughout the country, warning them of the risk of damage to the contents of parcels through thoughtless and careless packing. A man sent bullion from abroad consisting of 400 sovereigns placed loosely in a light wooden box. The shaking on the journey forced the sides of the box open, and the sovereigns were scattered among the other parcels in the same sack. Umbrellas and sunshades are often sent by post wrapped up merely in brown paper. Now brown paper is just sufficient covering to be worse than none at all. In the case of an umbrella it hides the nature of the article, and without any covering at all it would stand a better chance of travelling safely. It is surprising, too, that china and glass ware are so frequently sent through the post with the barest protection. Perhaps a piece of cardboard or a small piece of corrugated

paper without shavings is all that is wrapped round a breakable article.

It has often been noticed that if a bottle of hair-wash or cod liver oil is broken in transit there is generally no difficulty in recovering a substantial portion of the contents to be poured into another bottle, but when a bottle of champagne or of whisky is broken none of the contents ever remain to be deposited in another vessel.

Ireland is a great country for dairy produce, and she sends many parcels of butter to England, but such parcels require careful packing. A parcel wrapped only in grease-proof paper, with an outer wrapper of linen, looks beautifully firm at the beginning of its journey, but in warm weather deterioration sets in quickly, and only the wrappers are left by the end of the journey. The tale is told by the other parcels in the receptacle. They have all been anointed with oil. One parcel may be a silk dress, another a gentleman's white shirt, another an album or the latest thing in millinery.

Who is responsible for lost parcels? In 99 cases out of 100 it may be confidently answered that the sender is the culprit. The parcel is probably sent with only a tie-on label, and this gets detached in transit. Tie-on labels ought never to be attached unless the address is also on some part of the parcel itself. Parcels of game and poultry are often sent with merely a paper label tied round the necks of the birds. Post Office servants do their best, but such labels will get torn off sometimes, and the birds then find their way to the Returned Parcel Office. Here they are only kept for a day or two, as they are perishable matter. They are sold at a sacrifice to outside tradesmen. Articles not of a perishable



Photo *Clarke & Hyde.*

The Parcel Post Hospital.

This is a section of the Parcel Post Hospital. The official is busy packing up again a parcel which has been carelessly posted. The baskets are behind him, and all manner of strange articles are sometimes found loose in them.

nature are kept for some months in case they may be claimed. In the Returned Parcel Office there is a motley collection of all kinds of articles awaiting claimants. An elaborate register is kept of these articles, and a history is furnished of all that is known respecting them.

Rats are occasionally very troublesome visitors in the Sorting Office: they are doubtless attracted by the many toothsome morsels contained in the parcels. It would seem, therefore, that cats should form a portion of the staff of every Parcel Office. The cat, however, is an animal capable of rapid demoralisation. It has been found from experience that a lazy cat will find it less irksome to feed off a pair of partridges or a pair of soles not properly packed than to wait and watch in holes and corners for rats. Besides, rats are everyday food. I am afraid that when the only thing which can be delivered to the addressee is a label with the intelligence on the back, "Found loose in Parcel Office," the cat knows something of the contents. What is the answer of the Department to unreasonable people who, not satisfied with the explanation on the label, demand their parcels? Something to this effect: "Exhaustive inquiry has been made, but the parcel cannot be traced. There is no legal obligation to pay compensation for any loss or damage to unregistered parcels, but the Postmaster-General voluntarily, and as an act of grace, has seen fit to pay compensation in this particular instance up to cost price of the goods." Such compensation in unregistered parcels must never exceed £2.

The Department takes great pains to repair damaged parcels where repair is at all practicable, and every Parcel Sorting Office has a hospital for dealing with parcels in all stages of dilapidation. Frequently the

only damage consists in a torn paper cover or a box with a broken lid, or a cracked bottle, the contents of which are beginning to leak out. In such cases repair is easy, but when the damage consists in a broken violin bow, smashed lantern slides, a piece of carving with some of the figures knocked off, or a dress with grease stains, the matter has to be referred to the sender or addressee, and negotiations follow.

All the railway companies convey parcels over their lines, and they receive a percentage on every parcel carried. The Parcel Mail Coaches I am dealing with in a subsequent chapter.

The disposal of parcels is not always a simple matter. Many towns and villages are far removed from the main lines of railway, and a parcel has sometimes to be sent to two or three intermediate towns before it can reach its destination. The journey, in fact, has to be done in stages. Owing to most of the main lines converging on London, that city has better facilities than any other for disposing of parcels. It is often quicker to send through London a parcel from a town in the Midlands or in the West addressed to a town in the Eastern counties.

An important development in connection with the Parcel Post has been the Express Delivery Service. On payment of a special fee a parcel can either be sent out in advance of the ordinary delivery after travelling by the ordinary mail, or it can be sent by express messenger all the way from the place of posting to the addressee.

One of the rules of the Parcel Post is that living creatures are not to be sent without the Postmaster-General's direct sanction, but in the express service by messenger all the way, this is allowed. Dogs on chain

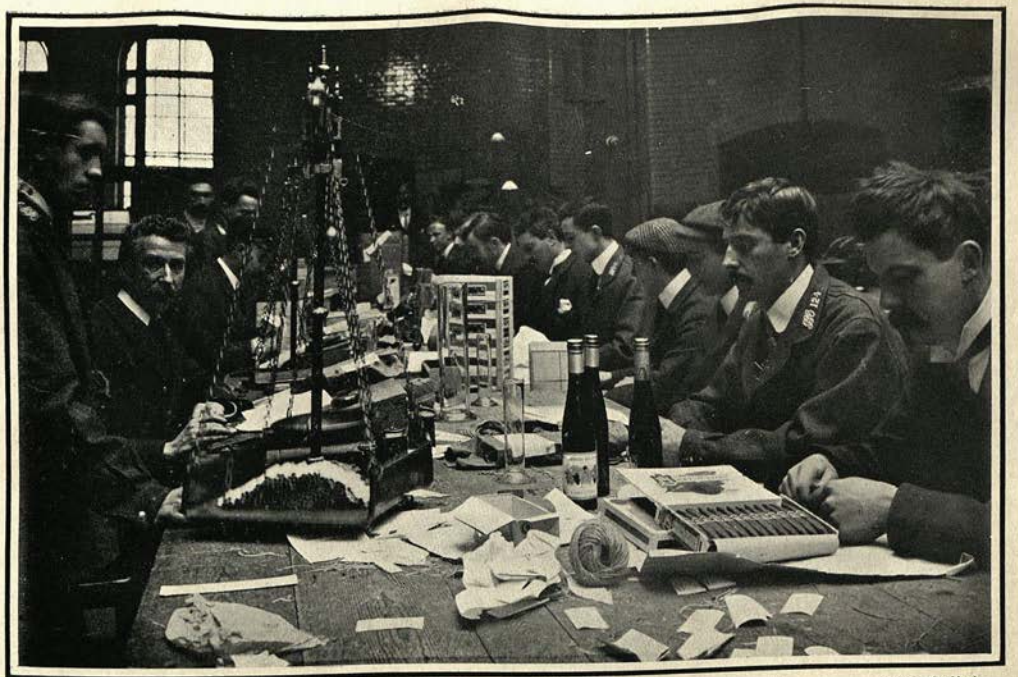


Photo *Clarke & Hyde*

THE CUSTOM HOUSE OFFICERS AT WORK.

Dutiable articles sent through the Post Office are opened and examined by the Custom House officials. Cigars, wines, cigarettes, etc., are shown here.

and cats in baskets and other live stock are sent out in charge of express messengers. On one occasion a man who had lost his way in London went into a post office, paid the express fee, and asked to be taken to his destination by Express Post. This was at once arranged.

It may seem strange to have Customs officers working in a Parcel Sorting Office, but these individuals may be seen at all hours of the day at Mount Pleasant, at Liverpool, and other seaports. The officials are present at the offices to examine parcels coming into the United Kingdom from abroad. All parcels from the Colonies or foreign countries are liable to Customs examination, and every parcel coming into the country has therefore to be accompanied by papers declaring the contents of the parcel. Many tales could be told of the discrepancies between declared and actual contents: the smuggling habit seems to be ingrained in the human race.

It is a melancholy fact that a large number of the public cannot be trusted to send a parcel honestly, that a still larger number cannot be relied on to address one correctly, and that a yet larger number cannot pack a parcel. If the faults of the public in these respects could be remedied to any great extent, the force at Mount Pleasant could be reduced considerably, and there would be a substantial gain to the revenue.

CHAPTER VII

MOTOR MAILS

IN my first chapter I made a point of the fact that at the moment when travelling by mail coach had reached its highest point of excellence the coming of the railway gave the death-blow to the whole system. The long-distance traffic of this country was in the course of a few years diverted from the main roads, and for thirty years these thoroughfares, save for the local traffic between neighbouring places, were *silent* and unused. Nowhere was this revolution more noticeable than in the district round London. The Great North Road was perhaps the busiest of all the coach routes, and in 1832 no fewer than between fifty and sixty coaches, twenty of them mail coaches, ran on this road alone. At Barnet, the first stage out of London, the double trips resulted in a coach passing through the town in one direction or the other every quarter of an hour.

The coaching inn with its courtyard and fine stabling fell from its high estate, and a younger generation marvelled at the number of public-houses on a road with little or no traffic. They wondered, too, at the fine wide thoroughfares running through the country towns. Where was the traffic? Why the extravagance of space?

I suppose that as late as the year 1870 the life of the road appeared dead beyond recall, and nothing seemed more unlikely than that the coaching inn would

come into favour again. The whole tendency of the time seemed to be to develop the traffic on the railway. Even walking appeared to be in danger of becoming a lost art.

Then in the early seventies began a little stream of bicycles along the forsaken highways: the stream grew and grew: tricycles came in, then safety bicycles, and ladies took to the wheel. Wayside inns began to find their use once more, and the road was alive again. Then arrived the motor, and we have now the astonishing result that on many routes out of London the quieter and least dangerous thoroughfare for foot passengers to cross is the railway.

But I am anticipating. I want to tell the story of the return of the Post Office to the road, and to draw an interesting parallel between the traffic of a hundred years ago and that of to-day. The first of John Palmer's mail coaches began to run in 1784, and the system lasted nearly sixty years. The determining cause which induced the Post Office to take to the road again was the introduction of the Parcel Post. The railway company receives 55 per cent. of the stamp value of every parcel, and as the collecting, sorting, and distributing expenses are heavy, the cost of transmitting parcels in this manner is considerable. The Post Office naturally dislikes to hand over to the railway companies postage which it can economically retain in its own hands, and it was to avoid the railway charges that road services, extending to places not exceeding fifty miles or thereabouts from London, were instituted. On the 1st June 1887, the revival of the road began for the Post Office, and a parcel mail coach service was started between London and Brighton. This was the Jubilee year, and the running of the new service attracted a great deal of public attention. In a short time there

were coaches running from London Bridge to Tunbridge Wells and Chatham, and from Mount Pleasant to Watford, Colchester, Hertford, Ware with branches. There was a coach to Bedford with a branch to Cambridge, another from Paddington to Oxford *via* Reading, and yet others to Windsor and Guildford with services to Epsom and Leatherhead. These coaches, drawn by three or four horses, were in charge of guards who carried arms; and for more than ten years the resemblance between the old and the modern mail service was striking. The difference, and of course a very notable one, was that the modern coach carried no passengers. But it carried with it all the prestige of "His Majesty's Service," and it maintained all the old traditions of speed and punctuality—so much so that the villagers on the route set their clocks when the mail passed.

The coming of the motor brought about another revolution. Many of my readers will remember the 14th November 1896, when a large number of motor carriages and vans assembled at Northumberland Avenue, Charing Cross, to celebrate by a run to Brighton the passing of the Act of Parliament which regulated the use of these vehicles. The Act came into operation on that day. Many of these motors never reached Brighton; they broke down at various points on the route; but the trip was an object-lesson to the British public of the possibilities of motor traffic. It impressed the Post Office authorities, who were among the first of the large business concerns in this country to adopt motor traction. As early as 1897 experimental trials were made between the General Post Office and the South-Western District Office, and between the latter office and Kingston-on-Thames. During the same year a steam motor was tried between London and Redhill,

a distance of about 46 miles there and back. Experiments were also made with electric motors in different parts of the country at the same time.

There was a difficulty at the outset owing to the Board of Trade regulations which prohibited vans weighing more than 1½ tons (unladen) from travelling more than 8 miles an hour. Difficulty was experienced in constructing cars of sufficient carrying capacity which should be within the limit of weight. This restriction was afterwards removed, so that it has been possible to build much larger motors, timed to travel at a faster rate of speed.

In spite, however, of the numerous improvements in the mechanism of motors, the new method of traction was far from perfect for several years, and as late as 1902 the official report was, "So far no motor vehicle which has been found can be relied on to carry heavy mails with the same regularity as vans drawn by horses." Even two years later, in 1904, the opinion held was "that motor vans were not so reliable as horse-drawn vehicles."

It is obvious that what the Post Office required was regularity and certainty rather than speed for their parcels traffic, and so long as the motor was constantly liable to breakdowns and maintained uncertain speeds it was unsuitable.

The steam motor service between London and Redhill was only an experiment, and the horse-drawn vehicle maintained its old position on that route until 1902, when the improvements in motors justified the Post Office in starting a motor service. Since 1902 the London and Redhill service has been performed by motors. Since 1905 the Brighton service has been worked by motor van, the daily journey there and back being 109 miles. In the following year motor vans

ran to Hastings, Tunbridge Wells, and Eastbourne. Then followed in three succeeding years new motor services to Ipswich, Southampton, Cambridge, Reading, Portsmouth, Oxford, Birmingham, Stony Stratford and Leicester, Tilbury, Aylesbury, Dover, and Ramsgate. In addition there were cross services between Manchester and Liverpool, Birmingham and Warwick and Worcester, Leeds and York, and a number of other places.

The distance covered by Post Office motor vans runs into several thousands of miles daily.

Motor vans can travel much faster than the old four-horse coaches. Palmer's idea of the ultimate speed of the mail coach was 10 miles an hour. This speed was often attained before 1840, but no doubt the average all over the country was more like 7 or 8 miles an hour. And this was the average speed of the Parcel Post horse-drawn coaches. The usual rate of the motor coaches is 10 miles an hour.

Another advantage claimed by motor vans compared with horse-drawn coaches is that they can carry heavier loads. The larger night vans can take a load of $2\frac{1}{4}$ tons as compared with $1\frac{1}{2}$ tons, the carrying capacity of the old horse coaches.

Most of these motor mail coaches travel during the night. In the case of the long-distance services, such as London and Brighton, two vehicles are used, starting from each end of the journey, meeting half way. It is remarkable how little the place of meeting varies each journey. De Quincey, in a footnote to his essay on *The English Mail Coach*, remarks upon this same feature in the early years of the last century. "One case was familiar to mail coach travellers when two mails in opposite directions, north and south, starting at the same minute from points six hundred

miles apart, met almost constantly at a particular bridge which bisected the total distance."

These night motor coaches are timed to arrive at their destination so that the mails conveyed can be distributed by the first morning delivery. A guard accompanies most of the coaches, and in addition to looking after the safety of the mails and assisting in loading and unloading, he sorts parcels received from places *en route* for places served by the coach. These vehicles serve, therefore, a similar function to the Travelling Post Office.

The guards used to carry arms for defence in case of attack, but they are now only supplied with a truncheon and whistle.

The motor coaches are met at the more important cross roads by smaller motors and carts, with which they exchange mails. There is in this way a network of van services stretching over the whole country.

The silent highway is stirred into a sudden activity when the Post Office night motor van appears. Hundreds of haycarts make their way to London during the night-time along some of the Essex roads. The drivers of these carts work very long hours and often fall asleep. The horses sometimes stop and go to sleep also. These carts standing in the centre of the highway are often a source of danger to the motor mail vans, and we can imagine the feelings of a driver of one of the carts when awakened from a long sleep by the hoot of the motor, and perhaps realising that he is miles farther from his destination than he should be.

Hop-pickers in Kent frequently sleep at night with their heads under a hedge and their feet stretching into the roadway. Accidents have only been avoided through the alertness of the mail van drivers.

Motor Mails

A great difference between driving a horse mail coach and a motor vehicle is that, in the case of the former, the horses can be trusted to find their own way if the driver dozed off for a moment. With motors, however, a similar lapse on the driver's part would spell disaster.

An old mail cart driver whom I once interviewed told me this story. "I was driving the mail one night from Chesham to Taplow, and arriving at Beaconsfield, which is nearly half-way, I got down from my seat and went into the inn, saying to the Post Office official who was in attendance that he could take out the bag himself from the back of the car. He did so, and then shut down the lid of the mail box with a bang. This was sufficient notice to the horse that all was ready to start, and off he trotted without his driver, in the darkness of the night. Ten and a half miles was the distance he had to travel, and the horse knew his business as well as the required pace, and he trotted into Taplow station within a minute of his scheduled time."

I asked the man if he got into trouble for the apparent neglect of his Majesty's mails. His face brightened up as the face of every official does when he recollects the sins he has committed which have not been found out.

"You see, sir, a porter was waiting for me at the station, and he wondered, but determined not to give the show away. He unloaded the mails as if nothing extraordinary was happening. Then he went in search of me. I walked the distance, full of terrible thoughts and gloomy fears." And he added, "I wonder if these much-talked-of motor cars are likely to be of such service to the Post Office as my good old horse."

Some time ago a motor mail van was coasting down

a Kentish hill on a dark night, and at a bend of the road, the bright lights of the motor revealed a dark object lying right across the roadway. The powerful brakes were quickly applied, and the vehicle was pulled up just in time to avoid an accident. The obstacle was a railway sleeper, which had apparently been placed there by some miscreant with the idea of wrecking the mail. Several men were seen disappearing across the fields skirting the road when the motor stopped.

On another night a shot was fired at the same motor coach, only narrowly missing the driver, for the bullet passed through the glass window at his side. Both outrages are supposed to have been the work of the same persons, who had some grievance against the motor. They were perhaps making a last stand on behalf of their friends the horses. Country folk are conservative above all other people. The horse and cart is to them almost the divinely appointed means of transit, and to attempt to overthrow it is sacrilege. All other forms of locomotion are distasteful to the true countryman. "How did you like foreign parts?" asked a Kentish farmer of his labourer, who had been across to Boulogne. "Furrin parts was all right," replied the labourer, "but that boat! Give me 'orse and cart, sir."

One night a motor mail driver suddenly pulled up at what appeared to be an ordinary walking-stick lying across the road. On approaching nearer, to the consternation of the driver it glided rapidly away. The guard simply said "Snakes," and this was the explanation.

The only light along the road for a great part of the way is that afforded by the motor's own lamps. Wonderful effects on the eye are often produced between lamplight and darkness, and commonplace objects

often assume uncanny shapes and sizes. A number of heaps of stones intended for road-mending purposes had lain alongside a certain road for weeks. One night a motor van driver was startled by what appeared to be one of these heaps rising suddenly and approaching the coach. His heart went into his mouth, and he applied his brake, ready for a struggle with animated stones. And then to his relief—he was not anxious for miracles—an old white cow looked into his face; she had strayed on to the road; he had mistaken her for stones.

On some routes the guards of the motors have been employed for many years. These men seem to have inherited the superstitions common to the old post-boys. On one of the roads out of London the following story is implicitly believed. A mail van travelling one night knocked down an old man with a long white beard, seriously injuring him. As the coach was fully loaded with the mails, there was no room for the injured man, so he was carefully laid by the roadside out of harm's way and the coach hastened away for assistance. Returning in a very short time to the spot, the old man was nowhere to be found, although there were traces of blood round about. He was never heard of again. At the same spot two drivers, neither of whom had heard of the previous occurrence, pulled up their coaches under the firm conviction that they had knocked down an old man with a long white beard. No trace could be found of the individual, nor anything which would explain the strange circumstance. The drivers, however, stick to their stories, and they tell them to you with the evident conviction that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your sceptical philosophy. Anyhow, it is a relief to think that the motors have not driven away

the supernatural from the roads. The spirits are there still, and though men drive motors instead of horses, they see ghosts just in the same old way as their fathers. Motor men have not yet established a character of their own, as was the case with the coach-drivers. There was, years ago, a mail contractor and wagoner who was stated to be worth £100,000, but he always dressed in a white smock frock. He bore the delightful name of Jolly. One winter there was a great deal of snow, and Mr. Jolly thought he ought to be paid extra for the additional work, but the Department would not hear of it. So he memorialised the Postmaster-General in a very unconventional manner, but characteristic of his profession.

"MY LORD,—I, John Jolly, of ——, have conveyed her Majesty's mails over hedges, ditches, and stone walls, and I, John Jolly, have never been properly paid for the same." (Here it is thought he lost his temper and his limited vocabulary of decent words.) "And I, John Jolly, will see the Postmaster-General damned before I, John Jolly, do it again."

Many Post Office memorialists probably mean this when they approach the Postmaster-General as "obedient servants," but they have not been trained on the road.

CHAPTER VIII

THE UNDELIVERED POSTAL PACKET

IT is often brought as a reproach against the General Post Office that while it occasionally fails to deliver a letter which is only slightly incorrect in its address, it frequently succeeds if the address is entirely wrong or is more or less unintelligible to the average reader. But Post Office men and women have the ordinary human point of view, and we must not blame them for sometimes despising the solution of simple difficulties and laying themselves out to solve the larger problems of official life. Like Naaman, they prefer to be asked to do some great thing. For one reason, both their chiefs and the public will give them more credit for solving an apparently hopeless puzzle than for suggesting a way out of an easy difficulty. They may have in the one case a paragraph all to themselves in the *Daily Mail:* in the other case they will not even be thanked by the man who receives the letter, and who is not modest enough to be surprised because he is known to the Post Office in spite of an imperfect address.

None the less, the failure of the Post Office to deliver a letter often means a loss of self-respect to the member of the Department whose duty it is to find an owner for the packet, and he will make great efforts to save his reputation.

The Department which deals with the undelivered letters is called the Returned Letter Office, but the older

and more striking name was the Dead Letter Office. This name, however, gave rise to some misunderstanding on the part of the simple-minded British public. Many thought that this office was a place where they could learn all about dead and missing friends and relatives. Descriptions were frequently sent as to the age and appearance of lost fathers, husbands, uncles, &c. For instance, information was required of the whereabouts of "R——, a carpenter by trade, 5 feet 10½, blue eyes, brown hare, and a cut on the forreid, a lump on the smorle of his back, and no whiskers." A lady wrote this letter: "To the Dead Office Post Office, London. I, the mother of Michael Roach, beg leave to write to you trusting that you will kindly send me the necessary information regarding the death of my son, and if dead you as a gentleman will kindly send me an answer to this, whether dead or living."

Other folk who are influenced by superstitious considerations disliked the gruesome suggestiveness of the title. Hence this letter: "To the Dead-Letter Office. If any of my letters should come to your office that I have not sent since the last, will you be so kind as to burn them and never send them back to me. After that one came, as many as 21 persons have died and been buried in this little place, and I don't know what will be the end of it. I think this will be my last."

Communications of this nature may have brought about the change in name, but I am inclined to think that this was induced by the reluctance of the staff to admit the deadness of any postal packet which passed through their hands.

At one time there were Dead Letter Offices only in London, Edinburgh, and Dublin, but now the chief towns in the Kingdom have their own Returned Letter Offices, and they deal with the business in their own districts.

The Undelivered Postal Packet

Our first thought will probably be that the work of these offices must be of a somewhat simple character, but this idea will not survive many minutes' consideration. A large proportion of the letters are found to contain enclosures of varying value which require special treatment. Among them are bank notes, cheques, bills of exchange, letters of credit, circular notes, dividend warrants, money and postal orders, stamps, jewellery, and countless articles of value. All these different items have to be accounted for, and care taken that none but the rightful owners shall possess them.

The figures relating to these undelivered postal packets are positively startling. They show an amount of carelessness on the part of the British public which in these days of universal education is almost unexplainable. During the year ending March 1910 the total number of undelivered packets of all kinds, including packets entirely unaddressed and articles found loose, is estimated to have reached a total of 31,241,000. The curious thing about these figures is that they include nearly 400,000 packets containing articles of value. The total amount of money found in addressed and unaddressed packets was £647,832, of which £15,127 was in cash and bank notes and £632,705 in bills, cheques, money orders, postal orders, and postage stamps. These figures, of course, do not include the value of remittances which may have been enclosed in packets returned unopened to the senders or the value of miscellaneous property dealt with as undeliverable.

The number of packets of all descriptions posted during the same year without any address and of articles found loose in the post was 427,000. Among these were bank notes and cash to the value of about



Photo *Clarke & Hyde.*

THE SORTING OFFICE.

The final sorting of the letters, which pass through the hands of three different sets of sorters. The last set sort them into thoroughfares ready for delivery. Notice the labels above the shelves. The term "Road" is an interesting survival from the old coaching days.

£1500, and bills, cheques, and other forms of remittance to the value of about £16,000.

It would almost seem as if we had been instructing our people in the higher branches of education and that large numbers were still in ignorance how to address a letter properly or to see that it is stuck down effectively before it is despatched. The only other explanations must be that hustling and hurry in business are on the increase, and that absent-mindedness is a widespread disease.

But sometimes the reasons for the apparent negligence may be quite different. A heavy letter packet was received as a "Dead Letter" from Australia. It had been posted in London some three or four years before. On opening the packet it was found to contain an old leather pocket-book filled with sovereigns to the number of one hundred. It contained no name of the sender and no communication whatever. It was kept in the safe for three years, was not claimed, and the money was eventually paid into the Revenue.

Another packet mailed "Advertised but not claimed" was returned from the United States. It contained a valuable gold watch embedded in a book. A round well had been cleverly cut through all the pages, and in that the watch had been so tightly deposited that it was difficult to extract it. There was no writing nor any clue to the sender with it. This was never inquired for.

It is possible that both these packets were the fruits of robberies, and the thieves, to avoid the risk of being found with these hauls on them, had made them up into postal packets and addressed them to places where they intended to follow, but their plans had been frustrated.

The Undelivered Postal Packet

Here is a curious example of carelessness on the part of a member of the public:—

A registered parcel which reached one of the Returned Letter Branches as undeliverable was found to contain jewellery the value of which must have exceeded £2000. The contents included a pearl and diamond necklace which was valued, according to a letter found in the parcel, at £1100. The sender was advised in the usual course, and in reply she stated that the parcel was of great importance, and she requested that it might be forwarded at once to the correct address (which she furnished), adding that the amount of postage required for re-direction was enclosed. The stamps for fresh postage were not, however, enclosed, but were afterwards received in a registered letter, with a note that the sender had forgotten to enclose them in the first letter. We should not be surprised if we heard that the lady was an authoress.

It is no uncommon occurrence for valuable documents to be found in pillar boxes. Here are a few examples:—Bonds to bearer of the nominal value of £800 were posted inadvertently with their correspondence by a firm of brokers; an unaddressed letter from a marquis enclosing a cheque for £3000; a letter of credit for £1000 posted without address.

A watch and chain, and several articles of personal jewellery such as might fittingly adorn the person of a gentleman in easy circumstances, were found in a pillar box, and the why and the wherefore remained for some time a mystery. Eventually a nurse wrote up to the Head Office about them, and it then appeared that the articles belonged to a poor fellow of weak intellect who, on this particular day, escaped from his

keeper, and was subsequently found wandering about in a state of partial undress.

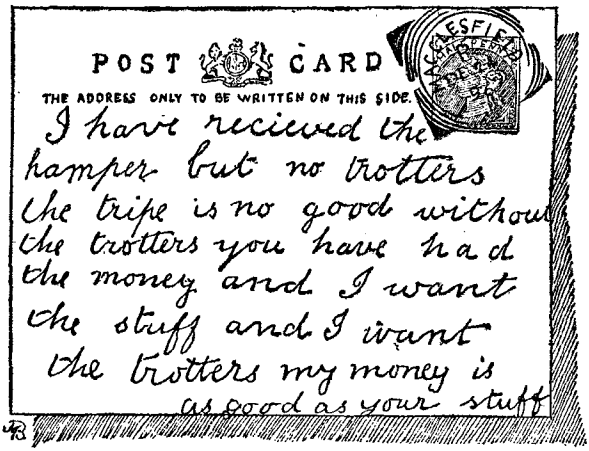
A small bottle of white powder was found loose in the post some years ago. It presented no uncommon feature, and was placed with a number of similar and more or less valuable articles to await inquiry. There was some astonishment when, a few days later, an inquiry came from a professor at an English college describing the contents of the phial as a compound of radium, and stating that the insignificant white powder was almost priceless.

There have been many instances of letters having been posted in the receptacles used by scavengers in cleansing the streets. One old lady complained that letters sent by her were not reaching their destination. On inquiry it was found that she had been in the habit of posting them in a drain outside the post office. But her action was quite intelligent when compared with that of a servant girl who had recently arrived from a rural district, and was sent by her mistress to the bank with a pass-book and cash to the value of £38. The maid, it seems, had possessed from childhood a money-box in the shape of a miniature pillar-box which she always called her bank, and seeing a duplicate of her treasure standing in the street she immediately concluded this was the bank of her mistress; its greater size compared with hers seemed to be evidence of the fact, in that her mistress was a woman of ample means. She then posted both pass-book and money in the pillar-box. On her return she was asked for the pass-book, and replied that she had put it in with the money. "Whom did you see?" asked the mistress. The girl replied, "I couldn't see no one, ma'am, although I looked for a long time in the hole."

The Undelivered Postal Packet

Now let me give a delightful facsimile of the posted packet which is despatched unaddressed.

A lady, almost overcome with indignation, seized a postcard and wrote an angry note to her butcher. In her wrath she thought only of the strong words she wanted to use, and she wrote these on the address portion and then posted the card, omitting altogether the name and address of the butcher.


POST CARD

THE ADDRESS ONLY TO BE WRITTEN ON THIS SIDE.

I have recieved the hamper but no trotters the tripe is no good without the trotters you have had the money and I want the stuff and I want the trotters my money is as good as your stuff

The notorious "Spanish Swindle" sometimes comes under notice in the Returned Letter Offices. One letter addressed "to Don X. Y. Z., Madrid," which fortunately for the sender was returned from Spain as undeliverable, was found to contain £185 in bank notes. The sender was an illiterate man who had raised all the money he could in the hope of gaining £10,000.

One of the curious incidents of the office was the return of a letter from Italy in 1905 marked "undeliverable" which had been posted in Ireland in 1862. The letter contained a Second of Exchange for £600.

The Undelivered Postal Packet

As a rule the public trusts the Post Office too much. They have a kind of impression that it can work miracles, and very little assistance in consequence is needed on their part. How else can we explain an address such as this? "To my dear Father in Yorkshire at the white cottage with green palings." This was the address of a packet containing a pair of steel spectacles which a poor girl was sending to her father, implicitly believing that the Post Office would deliver it. Of course it could not be delivered neither could it be returned.

I cannot deny that the Post Office frequently encourages people in the idea that it can do great things. An Aberystwith postman managed to deliver to the proper person a letter bearing the address, "Mrs. Brown, Wearing a Large Bear Boa, Violet Flowers in Bonnet. Promenade mornings, Aberystwith." The letter was from the lady's son, who had mislaid his mother's seaside address. This was a comparatively easy puzzle, and probably any observant man would have found the lady.

The following was perhaps a little more difficult. An American gentleman arrived in England, and not knowing where a sister was residing at the time, addressed a letter to her previous residence thus—

"Upper Norwood
or Elsewhere."

The letter was delivered to the lady on the top of a coach in Wales, and in thanking the Department for what had been done the gentleman said, "that no other country can show the parallel or would take the trouble at any cost."

Here is another quaint address: "To the military gentleman who arrived from Aldershot on Thursday,

who often stays at the Queen's Hotel, and who wear a long fawn overcoat and light cap. Queen's Hotel."

I am afraid a great many people furnish puzzl addresses with malice aforethought, and the Departmen does its best to discourage such attempts to waste it time. An official may sometimes make an effort t deliver such packets, but there is no call upon hin to do so. For instance, a letter was posted in Londo addressed as follows :—

"From an old Bachelor
To a Young Lady,
The Youngest of Three,
Who lives in a house
Close down by the sea,
The house is quite large,
Part of it used for a shop,
Where the relatives
Deal in tea, bacca, and soap,
In the scraggy tail end of the British Isles."

The letter was passed on from one sorter to another, and was finally hung up. Then a sorter wrote in blue pencil across it—

"Now, postal officials, don't curse so;
It's probably intended for Thurso."

Away went the letter to the extreme north, but Thurso did not own to the young lady. Kirkwall was then tried, and eventually the packet found an owner in a village in the Shetland Islands. This was evidently more than the writer deserved.

A letter was returned undelivered with unmistakable signs on the address portion of the efforts that had been made by the Department to effect its delivery. "Not Cæsar," "Try Hannibal," "Not in Jupiter," "Try Mars," were the sorters' and postmen's notes,

showing that the universe, seen and unseen, had apparently been searched in vain. Yet the owner of the letter was simply an able-bodied seaman attached to the Channel Fleet. Many people will doubtless think what an amusing place the Returned Letter Office must be, and how interesting must be the duty of reading the undelivered letters. But they have only to realise the number which pass through the office daily to understand that very little time can be given to reading other people's correspondence. Moreover, most of it is terribly dull and uninteresting to strangers. Now and then the eye of the clerk spots something good, but he is usually thinking more of correct addresses than jokes. These lines were found in a lost letter written from a wife to her husband at sea :—

"Darling, there is a promise in your eye :
I will tend you while I'm living,
You will whack me while I die—
And if death kindly leads me
To the blessed shades on high
What a hundred thousand welcomes
Shall await you in the sky."

The man who supplied me with these verses says the lady mis-spelt "watch" as "whack," but I see no reason why her sentiments should be explained away.

I am sorry to say that the complaints of the public respecting the non-delivery of their letters are not always politely expressed. No allowance is made for possible errors on the part of the person sending the letter. The following letter is at least outspoken :—

"To Dead Letter Office

"If I don't get an anser to this I shall say there as been rogery at work somewhere. I wont be rob out of my money not by no one. I sent a P.O. for a pound

and it is hard I should waste my time here. If I dont receive a anser on Tuesday morning some one will receive vitrol in their face. if others be rogues I will be villain. i dont mind penal servitude send a anser as soon as possible if you receive same."

This is, I suppose, what is called being quits.

The following letter was received by the Postmaster-General, and I have seldom seen a case in which the accuser comes into court with dirtier hands :—

"Enclosed please find wrongly addressed envelope which was sent after I had given my correct address to you. Such careless mistakes are deeply to be deplored, and I trust they will not occur again.

"Is there in your Dead Letter Office a post-card addressed to Mr. J. M., 35 —— Villas? If so please return it, as I put the wrong address on it. It was posted three weeks ago."

There is more justice in the complaint of a man who claimed £2 compensation because a letter containing no value from the woman he was engaged to marry had failed to reach him. In his own words: "That letter I would not have missed for anything—through that I lost a wife. After returning from a nine months' voyage my intended wife was not to be found, and I do not consider £2 full compensation." There is no doubt, however, that such a sum would have gone a considerable way towards repairing the loss, but the Department was obliged to inform the man that the Postmaster-General could not be held responsible for the loss of the lady. She was not a registered packet.

The form of inquiry which is handed to applicants for missing postal packets does not err by asking too little. A man had carefully and laboriously filled up answers to all the questions relevant and irrelevant

to his particular loss, and then he came to the concluding sentence: "Any other observations should be made here." At this point, his pent-up feelings got the better of him, and he wrote simply "Damn."

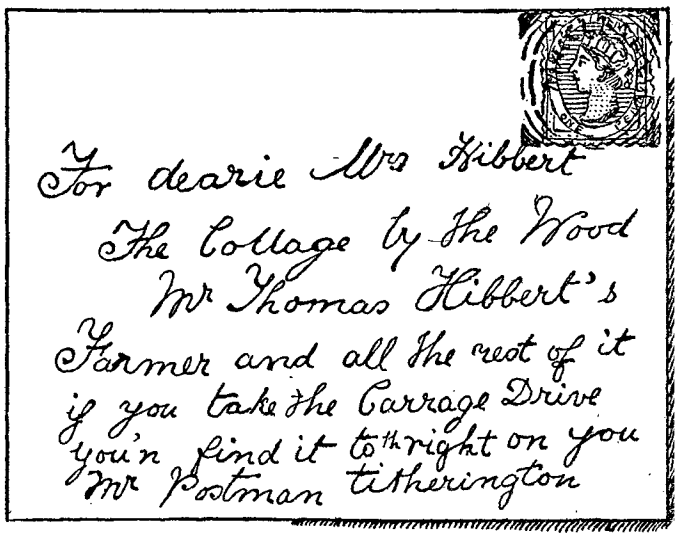
Another story bearing on the complexity of this same form tells of the case of a man who in filling up the form had omitted certain important particulars. The form was returned for completion, only to come back from the postmaster to this effect, that "Mr. —— after filling up the form (in the first instance) had had a fit and died."

Some postmasters take themselves and their duties very seriously: they will even pursue a missing packet after it has been found. Application had been made respecting a missing letter, and in the course of the official inquiries the papers were referred to the postmaster at the office of posting with a request for precise particulars of posting. Directly afterwards a communication was received from the sender saying that the letter inquired for had been found. This communication was sent forthwith to the postmaster, who it was assumed would understand that the inquiry was at an end. But the postmaster was misjudged: he went on with the case. He kept the case for about six weeks, trying to obtain from the exasperated sender particulars of the posting of the letter. He then returned the papers, confessing that he had been baffled, and that the case was incomplete.

Every Christmas brings a number of letters from children addressed to Santa Claus. One such letter, addressed "Santa Claus, Chimney Corner, Heaven," was sent by a playful sorter to Hever, Edenbridge, for trial. It is pathetic to think that the destination of all letters so addressed is the prosaic Returned Letter Office. A spinster lady who lived in a county town at a house delightfully named "The Haven" wrote to

the Postmaster-General to complain that an official letter had been sent to her bearing a wrong address. The abode with the restful name had actually been described as "The Harem"! No wonder the lady's deepest feelings were aroused, and she was scarcely consoled by the expression of the Postmaster-General's regret that the envelope had been inadvertently addressed in this way.

Here is the facsimile of another envelope :—


For dearie Mrs Hibbert
The Cottage by the Wood
Mr Thomas Hibbert's
Farmer and all the rest of it
if you take the Carrage Drive
you'n find it to the right on you
Mr Postman titherington

Addresses are sometimes obviously taken from invoices or memoranda forms. "Messrs. Hair cut by machinery," and

"Mr. Richard Funerals
at shortest notice
Mile End,"

are of this kind. This sort of thing is often done by foreigners.

The Undelivered Postal Packet

People of the same name living in the same place constantly embarrass the officers of the Department. Two gentlemen, one a Minor Canon and the other an Independent Minister, each bearing the same Christian name and surname, lived in a city on the west coast of England, and it sometimes happened that a letter or parcel intended for the one was delivered to the other, who sent it on to its rightful owner with an apology. These mistakes never caused any misunderstanding until a parcel of game for the Minor Canon was delivered at the house of the Independent Minister, and in his absence was unopened. As soon as he returned home he discovered his mistake and sent the game, which was past eating, to the Minor Canon with a letter of apology. But the loss of the game so upset the Churchman that he wrote to the Dissenter, "If you had not assumed the title of Reverend, to which you have no right, this mistake would not have occurred." Soon afterwards another parcel was delivered to the Independent Minister, who found the contents to be manuscript sermons that had been ordered by the Minor Canon from an agent who supplied sermons to preachers unable or unwilling to write them. The sermons were at once repacked and sent to their owner with a note: "Sir, if you had not assumed an office for which you have no qualifications, this mistake would not have occurred."

The Post Office is always delighted to hear of its difficulties being adjusted by the complainants themselves: it can rarely speak out its own mind to the obtuse, the ignorant, and the careless. And it is not the uneducated folk who give the most trouble. In the autumn of 1910 there appeared in the *Morning Post* a letter signed "John Brown," and he described himself as "senior partner in the firm of Brown, Jones,

and Robinson, Dumpington House, Little Britain." The letter was obviously written sarcastically, and was a protest from a typical Briton's point of view against compulsory service, on the ground that it would mean interference with his profit-mongering and the curtailment of many of his luxuries. This is the kind of argument he used. "I have often to sign my name fifty times in the course of the day—a hard-working man of business. I must have some relaxation, and how could I obtain this if I were forced to sell my yacht and give up my moor in Scotland, to say nothing of my fishing in Norway. What, again, would my wife and family do without the little villa in the Riviera to fly to from the rigours of an English winter. And what, I should like to know, would my friends say, and how long should I retain them, if I had to make these enormous sacrifices, and all to please a parcel of scaremongers with no knowledge of business, no sense of duty, no appreciation of the claims of a man who would get on in the world and make a figure in the social life of the community?"

A retired military officer read this obviously faked-up letter and boiled over with indignation. He replied "direct," as he said in a letter to the Department, "to Mr. Brown at the address furnished; but to my surprise my envelope and enclosure were returned through the Dead Letter Office and marked, as you will see on the envelope, 'Not known.' I shall be glad if you will say why my letter was returned. As regards the address, Little Britain, our local postmaster here told me that Little Britain was London, E.C., and further that as a Londoner he knew it quite well."

The Department never laughs, and rarely gives a reply to anybody without some qualification. The cautious officer dealing with the case replied: "The address

in question *appears* to be fictitious. It is regretted that no assistance can be given you in the matter." This last sentence may of course have been intentionally subtle, because the assistance which the military gentleman required was evidently in the direction of the surgical operation recommended by Sydney Smith to obtuse North Britons.

The Department was called upon to explain a joke in another instance. The following note appeared outside a wrapper, addressed from Canada to this country :—

"This package contains a pair of undressed kids, size 6¾, colour black finish, extra fine: trade No., 23; manufactured in Paris, France, by Lemoine Fils & Co. To Mrs. J. Smith."

The recipient, on receipt of the packet, addressed this letter to the Postmaster-General :—

"DEAR SIR,—The addressee of the enclosed envelope was the recipient recently of the empty envelope and fillings which I beg to enclose for your inspection. The packet originally contained a pair of black kid gloves sent by Mr. J. Jones, Montreal. The gloves were evidently abstracted in Montreal, as a paper filling, a Montreal newspaper, was used as a blind to fill up the package. I can assure you that it could not have been the nature of a joke. If you can help me in this matter you will confer a favour on yours truly, ——"

Notice the Sherlock-Holmes-like touch in tracing the theft to Montreal. The Post Office again "helped" with this letter. "Inquiry will certainly be made on the receipt of a description from the sender of any article missing from the packet. It is, however, pointed out that the postage prepaid is only sufficient for the present contents and would not carry a pair of gloves,

that the cover bears the name of a toy company, and that the superscription may perhaps be a jocular allusion *to the black figures of undressed children enclosed in the envelope.*"

Every year the Postmaster-General makes the same appeal to the erring British public; he tells them the same pitiful tale of undelivered letters and parcels; he begs that ordinary care and discretion may be observed; and yet the trouble goes on. It is curious how the educated public as well as the uneducated fail in this matter.

CHAPTER IX

MONEY ORDERS AND POSTAL ORDERS

THE first business undertaken by the General Post Office, other than that of the despatch and delivery of correspondence, was the Money Order system. This has existed for considerably more than a century, but it was not taken over by the Post Office until the year 1838. It is not difficult to understand why the need for the system became urgent in carrying on the service of the posts. The sending of letters containing money was a constant and almost necessary practice, and the frequent thefts of letters of this kind became a public scandal. In 1791 a scheme was proposed to the Postmaster-General, but the legal adviser of the Department raised difficulties, and eventually it was decided that the business could not be officially adopted. Then followed the curious history of a private undertaking sanctioned and encouraged by the Postmaster-General. The six Clerks of the Roads, who were already conducting a large newspaper business for their own advantage, came forward with a proposal to undertake a Money Order plan, or as it was then called a "Money Letter" plan, and the Postmaster-General decided to give it official countenance. That is to say, he bore the cost of advertising it and allowed the advices of the Money Orders to go free by post under the frank of the Secretary of the Post Office. The Clerks of the Roads traded under the name of a private firm. They issued orders and advices very

much as at present, the amounts paid and received being accounted for quarterly with the Clerks of the Roads.

The theory of those opposed to the Postmaster-General undertaking directly the business, was that the money used by the country postmasters in the business was not the public revenue, but money which they had received as agents for the Clerks of the Roads in their newspaper business.

The scheme came into operation on 1st October 1792, and the limit of a Money Order was fixed at £5, 5s., and the commission charged was at first 6d. in the £1, of which the payee contributed half. The commission was reduced in 1793 to 4d. for Orders to and from London, while it remained at 6d. between country towns. Subsequently the commission rose to 8d. in the £1 for all Orders, in addition to stamp duty.

Over and above the commission on the Orders and the stamp duty the persons making use of them were obliged to pay the high postage of double letters, as the packet would contain both a letter and a Money Order. This was felt to be such a burden that in 1837 the Orders were printed at the top of a large sheet of paper on which a letter might be written, and the whole might pass for a single postage.

The capital embarked originally in the Money Order business by the Clerks of the Roads was £1000, and it does not seem to have been, even with the countenance of the Post Office, a paying concern, for in 1798 the Clerks of the Roads abandoned it, their loss on the six years' trading being £298. Three of the clerks, however, continued the business as a private speculation, and the anomaly of the arrangement came in for a great deal of adverse criticism. At last, in 1829, a Commission reported that they entirely disapproved



THE MAIL COACHES LEAVING LONDON.

In the early part of the nineteenth century one of the sights of London was the departure from St. Martin's le Grand every evening of the mail coaches bound for all parts of England.



THE LONDON POSTMAN.

(Old Style.)

The London postman of seventy or eighty years ago had to collect and account for the charge made on every letter, and there were no letter-boxes in front doors where he could discharge his correspondence.

of such a concern being carried on by private persons for their own profit, and they recommended "that its management should be directly controlled by proper officers of the Department, and that the produce be appropriated to the Revenue." It was nine years, however, after the Commission reported before the Postmaster-General was able to act on the suggestion, and to compensate the officers whose vested interests in the business had to be considered.

A large amount of coin was still sent by post, and with the intention of taking away all inducements to remit money in this way the commission was reduced in 1840 to 3d. and 6d. The number of Orders issued from 1797 to 1800 averaged 11,880 a year; in 1839, when the Post Office had taken over the business, the numbers rose to 188,000; and in the following two years after the rates were reduced the numbers were 587,000 in 1840 and 1,500,000 in 1841.

The Penny Postage reform gave a tremendous impetus to the use of Money Orders, and by the year 1853 the number had reached 5,000,000. Further reductions and adjustments of rates were made, and by 1870 the number stood at 9,750,000 Orders issued during one year; and in 1878 the highest number on record was reached, viz. 18,000,000. On sums of 10s. and under, only 1d. had been charged since 1871, and this low charge was found to be unremunerative. There was a loss on the whole business, and the rates were raised again in 1878. The introduction of Postal Orders in 1881 led to a diversion of much of the Money Order business, especially in the matter of small sums.

There are many stories in existence of the early days of the Money Order Office. All public offices have a sort of atmosphere of their own, a tradition of

work and the manner of work which lingers persistently under altering conditions. When the Money Order Office came under the direct control of the Post Office it was a long time before it was able to shake off the traditions of its early history as a private concern. Those were the days before competitive examinations, and when men could be pitchforked into high positions in the Civil Service from outside without official experience. In 1841 a President was appointed to the new Money Order Office, and his claim to the post seems to have been that he lent the premises which he occupied as a timber-merchant for political purposes. These were burnt down, and as compensation for disturbance his political friends rewarded him with a position at the Post Office.

If all the stories are true this ex-timber-merchant was a remarkable man and a still more remarkable official. Hourly his bell was rung. The messenger appeared. "What did I have last?" "Half a pint of stout, sir." "Then bring me half a pint of bitter." Another hour passed and the same form was gone through. "What did I have last?" "Half a pint of bitter, sir." "Then bring me half a pint of stout."

It was said that until the Money Order Office was taken in hand seriously by the Department, the most conspicuous article of office furniture was the pewter pot. At about 11 A.M. the potman from the old "Raglan" opposite used to come over with a great tray full of pints and half-pints, and the clerks drank the health of their friends and themselves before tackling the arduous business of the day. The potman grew to consider himself a member of the Post Office staff, and he is said on one occasion to have sharply reprimanded the Secretary of the Post Office in language peculiar to his class, for not making way for the pots to pass him on

the stairs. In the potman's eyes it was as big a crime as to delay the advance of his Majesty's mails.

This first President was said to be very amenable to the softening influence of a judicious present. The clerk who wanted a holiday would call in at Sweeting's and buy a brace of pheasants. Then he would put in his application for leave with the pheasants. Things were very lax indeed. One man was asked to explain his absence on a Saturday morning, and he replied: "My absence to-day was really not intended on my part. I mistook the day of the week, and thought the day was Sunday." I do not know whether it was in finding the door of his parish church closed that he discovered his mistake.

A man absented himself from the Office during the first three days of the week, and then calmly explained on the Thursday morning that he had overslept himself; in no other way could he explain the passing of the three days.

In those days, when a new Postmaster-General had an opportunity of using his patronage, new officers used to come up from the country in batches. Three or four Cumberland men, newly appointed as clerks, arrived at the Money Order Office one morning in a farmer's cart, in which they had been driven up to town from the north. They had saved their coach fares, and were mightily proud of their achievement.

The Office was moved in 1847 from St. Martin's le Grand to an ugly and lofty building in Aldersgate Street. It was frankly stated at the time that "the building was not intended to be an ornament to the City, but *only* the Money Order Office." Those who remember this unsightly building do not require the unnecessary explanation.

In 1850 a new President was appointed, and he proved

to be a different man from his predecessor, and to the astonishment of his subordinates he declined pheasants and refused special leave. The Office had now grown considerably, and there were no less than 160 clerks. In 1854 a Commission, of which the late Sir Stafford Northcote was chairman, made a thorough investigation into the working of the Office, and many of the old abuses were swept away. One of the reforms which affected the public was to allow crossed Orders to be paid through banks without the usual formalities over a post office counter.

Almost from the first the Office undertook the free payment of Orders issued by the spending departments at Whitehall, the greater part of which consisted of Orders issued by the Admiralty and War Office in payment of pensions to soldiers and sailors. No payment is made to the Post Office for the work, but the advantages to the pensioner are great and obvious. By means of Money Orders they obtain payment at the nearest offices to their homes instead of having to attend personally at central pay offices and running the risk of being swindled by sharpers.

The Foreign Order system came into operation during the Crimean War. The British army in the East, and especially the civilian element of the expedition, who had not, like the soldiers, a regular official means of remitting money home, felt the need of some special arrangements for this purpose. Miss Nightingale remitted for these people no less a sum than £50 a week during 1855, and at the end of the year it was decided that the Army Post Office should issue Money Orders at inland rates at Constantinople, Scutari Headquarters, and Balaclava. The system began in January 1856, and during the first eight weeks more than £13,000 was remitted.

The total amount sent home during the war was £106,000.

In 1859 a Money Order Convention was arranged with Canada. The Postmaster-General reported on this as follows: "The enlargement of the Money Order system has worked very satisfactorily, and will, I hope, lead to the extension to other Colonies. Such an extension would, I am convinced, be productive of much good, would save much money that now probably runs to waste, would afford great relief to many weak and aged persons, separated by the broad ocean from the younger and more vigorous members of the family, and would materially promote self-supporting immigration."

The Money Order system was extended in 1862 and 1863 to Cape Colony, to the Australian and several of the West Indian Colonies. The rest of the Colonies soon followed the example.

Switzerland began to exchange Orders with us in 1869. Six months later Belgium followed, and then Germany came into the system in 1871. The United States and France followed suit a few years later. Spain and some of the States of Central and South America are now the only countries of importance with which this country does not exchange Money Orders.

The Foreign and Colonial Branch of the Office conducts a most complicated business. It is supposed to have the world's geography at its fingers' ends, to be able to find the whereabouts of every remote hamlet in South Africa or North America, to read half-a-dozen foreign languages, and to understand a score of systems of currency. The clerks are expected to be able to pacify hungry and ill-looking Poles and Italians, whose ignorance of the English language is only equal to their inability to grasp our system.

Money Orders and Postal Orders

Some years ago, in a discussion on the attitude of the Church of Rome towards the Church of England, Mr. Gladstone wrote a letter to the *Times* on the subject which was very much quoted in other journals. Several poor foreigners from the East End called at the Money Order Office in great distress. They had sent money abroad in postal notes and orders, and inquired anxiously as to their safety, as they had been alarmed by hearing that the Roman Catholic Archbishop had denied in the papers "the validity of Anglican orders." This is a good story even if it is not true.

I am reminded of a joint application to the Department by a clergyman and an official of the Bank of England. The occupations of the two were described as "Clerks in Holy Orders and in Bank of England." In justice to the clergyman, the description is in the writing of the Bank of England clerk.

Telegraph Money Orders were first introduced in 1889, and several years later the system was extended to most of the European countries.

Postal Orders were first issued in 1881, and from the first were a huge success. Nearly 650,000 were sold during the first three months, and the immediate effect was a reduction in the issue of Money Orders. The Postmaster-General in one of his reports was able to say that "Money Orders are often lost and often stolen, but the departmental check is so complete that not more than one in every hundred thousand of the Orders issued is paid to other than the lawful owner." That was a proud but justifiable boast, but of course it is a different matter altogether with the Postal Order. Still its cheapness and handiness outweighed all risks, and its popularity has never diminished. The total number of Orders issued during 1910 was 125,855,000, and the commission on them realised £483,421.

Money Orders and Postal Orders

The competitions arranged of late years by magazines and newspapers in the shape of missing words, Limericks, and puzzles have been felt nowhere more keenly than in the Postal Order branch. Some years ago a member of the staff in a private letter gave her experiences of a time of stress of this kind. "We are at present inundated with *Pearson's Weekly*. It is like the charge of the Light Brigade. Bundles to the right of us, bundles to the left of us, upstairs and downstairs. Pearson says in some interview that one of his female clerks counts the Postal Orders at the rate of 14,000 an hour with very few mistakes. The ordinary rate for the Post Office clerks who have had a good deal of experience, and who do it all day long, is between 3000 and 4000 per hour, and there are very few mistakes. I think any one who tried to count more than that would be a raving lunatic soon, and at any rate would not be able to continue at that speed (viz. 14,000 an hour) for six or seven consecutive hours. On one Tuesday morning a postmaster sent his ordinary requisition for a fortnight's supply, and over and above this asked for 250 at 1s. for some gentlemen who had already paid for them and wanted them urgently by Wednesday. When the competitions were announced to end several postmasters wrote asking for their stock to be taken back, as they were now overstocked. We ourselves helped to swell the number, and we have won occasionally, so that on the whole we don't mind the rush very much. There was one gentleman we heard of who having already sent up several words in one competition, thought of another at the last moment. He rushed out to the nearest post office, and asked a flaxen-haired damsel behind the counter for the necessary shilling Order. She had a scared look in her face, and she did not reply to the gentleman. She simply

called out despairingly, 'Father, here's another,' and fled. And the father put the shutters up, turned the gas out, and the word never reached Pearson's."

In the Postmaster-General's report for 1908 reference is made to the demand during 1907 for sixpenny orders in connection with "Limerick" competitions. The Postmaster-General is never flippant, nor does he feel bound as the head of a big business to deprecate this particular form of gambling: indeed there is almost a note of jubilation in the way he records an advance in the sales of Postal Orders of 23,000,000, largely due, as he says, to the competitions. And in his report for 1909 there is just a shade of disappointment in his manner of stating that the falling off in the sale of Orders, amounting to more than 10,000,000, is due to the passing away of the "Limerick" competitions.

Both in the Money Order and Postal Order Departments a great deal of the seamy side of our social life is revealed. Considerable numbers of Money Orders are sent to various lottery agents abroad, not a few go to firms of horse-racing bookmakers. Sometimes the public is unreasonable; it is curious how inquiries about money are usually expressed angrily and suspiciously. A payee was asked for full particulars of his Order, merely in order to trace it and help him to his lost property. His reply was on a postcard: "Why this humbug? I want my money."

One man had sent an Order to purchase a performing dog, but wanted his money back, because "the dog that played tricks was a fraud, and could no more sham death than a dying duck in a thunderstorm could sing the National Anthem." There was a twist in the man's mind which somehow led him to associate the Post Office with the dog having been palmed off on him.

Money Orders and Postal Orders

A small boy altered the amount on an Order, and on being found out wrote up to the Secretary, "I am a Sunday School scholar, and have been to Sunday School all the days of my life," and he wound up with, "O Lord, forgive me." The father undertook to administer the cane to the young scholar, and the Secretary did not pursue the matter.

In spite of the huge number of posted Orders which are issued, a small percentage only go astray. Extra commission is charged on Orders not presented within a given time, and there are often cases when on an Order being presented it is found that this extra commission amounts to more than the value of the Order. In every recorded instance of this sort the payee has preferred to retain the Order! People have sometimes inadvertently thrown Orders on the fire, and have then collected the ashes in a little tin box, which they have sent to the Department as a guarantee of their good faith, and not with any hope that the Order can be identified from the ashes. Applications have even been received respecting Orders which have accidentally been "sent to the wash," but the cleansing process has not been successful enough to obliterate the printing, and the Order can be cashed.

"They told me at the Post Office to go to the devil, and so I have come to you about my missing Order," exclaimed an excitable gentleman as he entered the Inquiry Office.

We hear many complaints of the incivility of Post Office clerks, but there is often another side to the matter. Some day, perhaps, a literary counter clerk will give us his opinions on the civility of the British public. Think of the numerous inquiries and complaints which are addressed in an hour to the busy man or woman behind the counter on every conceiv-

able subject of Post Office business, and we may wonder sometimes at the tempers which are not lost. In *Household Words*, many years ago, there was a description of the scene at a Money Order counter. "The clerks in this office ought to rival the lamented Sir Charles Bell in their knowledge of the expression of the hand. The varieties of hands that hover about the grating and are thrust through the little doorways in it are a continual study for them—or would be if they had time to spare, which assuredly they have not. The coarse-grained hand, which seems all thumb and knuckle and no nail, and which takes up money or puts it down with such an odd, clumsy, lumbering touch: the retail trader's hand, which clinks it up and tosses it over with a bounce: the housewife's hand, which has a lingering propensity to keep some of it back, and to drive a bargain by not paying in the last shilling or so of the sum for which her Order is obtained: the quick, the slow, the coarse, the fine, the sensitive and dull, the ready and unready—they are always at the grating all day long." And the Post Office man or woman has to humour the possessors of these hands, to be patient with the foolish, to be restrained with the impatient, "to be merciful towards the absurd," and to pay out or receive money all the time. Not all men and very few women understand the mysteries of change and commissions, and when they don't understand they suspect, and when they suspect they become unreasonable. It is difficult to say whether the public is most touchy when cashing or purchasing an Order. But in both cases it thinks it is being done by the long-suffering individual behind the counter.

CHAPTER X

THE POST OFFICE SAVINGS BANK

THE extension of banking facilities for the upper and middle classes of this country during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries only benefited the working classes indirectly. If they wished to save anything out of their earnings they were either obliged to resort to the time-honoured expedient of hiding their money in out-of-the-way corners of their houses or gardens or they entrusted it to the care of private individuals or institutions, and were in consequence without adequate security. Even in these days the old method of hiding their savings is adopted by many people, but the treasure is now not always money but the Savings Bank deposit book. A man once wrote to the Controller of the Post Office Savings Bank to explain the loss of his deposit book, and he said: "How I came to lose my book was, in a fright I buried it in my garden with other valuables. The garden, unfortunately for me, is very large, and I could never remember afterwards in what part I put it. Within the last month I have sold the premises, and being so deep it is not likely to be found by any one." The value of the Savings Bank came home to him when he realised that in burying his book he had not hidden his money. A new book was all that he required.

I believe that the first recorded instance of the establishment of a Savings Bank in the United Kingdom was in the year 1810, in the little village of Ruthwell in Scotland.

The Post Office Savings Bank

The minister of the church, the Rev. Henry Duncan, D.D., conceived the idea for the benefit of his parishioners, but found at first great difficulty in persuading people to entrust their money to him. To meet the difficulty a box was provided with three padlocks, which could only be opened in the presence of the three different holders of the keys. This box is still in existence, and was produced at the centenary of the opening of Savings Banks held at Edinburgh in 1910.

In 1817 Trustee Savings Banks were established in certain towns under regulations fixed by Act of Parliament, and for nearly half a century these institutions provided a means by which the small savings of the public could be deposited at a fixed rate of interest. But these were local banks, and there were still vast areas of population unprovided for in the matter of banking facilities. What was wanted was a system for the whole of the country, something which could really be regarded as a People's Bank.

The rapid extension of the Money Order system, and the creation in every town and in almost every village of a post office where business other than that of the receipt and despatch of correspondence was conducted, suggested to Mr. C. W. Sikes, a bank official of Huddersfield, that here was the organisation for the purpose. He wrote in 1860 an open letter to Mr. Gladstone, who was at the time Chancellor of the Exchequer, in which he pointed out that there were eighteen counties and 2000 towns without a Savings Bank of any kind. He directed Mr. Gladstone's attention to the success of the Money Order system, and he urged him to use the same medium for savings, "for thereby you bring the Savings Bank within less than an hour's walk of the fireside of every working man in the Kingdom." The appeal was successful. Mr. Gladstone with characteristic enthusiasm

adopted the plan, and carried a Bill through Parliament to give effect to the proposals. On the 16th September 1861 Post Office Saving Banks were opened in 300 towns, and from that date onwards the story has been one of continued progress. According to the Postmaster-General's report of 1910 the number of Post Office Savings Bank accounts, excluding those which experience has shown are dormant, was 7,913,295, and the amount of money standing to the credit of depositors was £164,596,065. The average amount of each deposit was £2, 7s. 9d.

Here, therefore, we have a People's Bank actually established in our midst, and the best excuse of the improvident no longer exists.

During the fifty years of its existence, remarkable developments have taken place in the working of the Post Office Savings Bank. The facilities for the public have been increased enormously, so much so that the old idea of a bank existing simply for the encouragement of thrift has been considerably modified. The ease with which withdrawals can now be made, and the extension in the limits of money which may be deposited annually, have provided the man or woman of small means with most of the advantages to be obtained from the possession of a current account at a private or joint-stock bank. And he obtains one additional advantage, in that on any sum from £1 upwards he obtains 2½ per cent. interest. These increased facilities are looked upon with disfavour by those who consider that the slight difficulties which were for many years placed in the way of those who wished to withdraw money, were created in the interests of the depositors themselves.

In order to bring out clearly what are the benefits of which I have spoken, let me state briefly the

possibilities which are open to a man who becomes a depositor. He goes to any post office where Savings Bank business is transacted, and after signing a declaration and depositing any sum, not containing fractions of a shilling, up to £50, a book is handed to him in which his transactions are recorded. That book can be used at any Post Office Savings Bank in the United Kingdom for deposits or withdrawals. He can deposit £50 in any year until a total of £200 is reached, and in addition he can replace the amount of one withdrawal made during any year. Further, he can invest in six different kinds of Government Stock to the amount of £200 Stock in a year, or £500 Stock in all, and he can make special deposits to cover his investments, irrespective of the limits fixed for his deposit account. Roughly speaking, he can therefore hold £200 in his deposit account and at the same time be the possessor, through the medium of the Post Office, of Stock of the nominal value of £500. The smallest amount of Stock he can purchase is one shilling. Means are provided by which he can transfer his Stock from time to time to the books of the Bank of England, and so enable him to continue purchasing Stock by means of his deposit account. Or he can buy a Stock certificate with coupons for dividends annexed. The commission on every transaction is considerably below that charged by a stockbroker.

Occasionally there appears in the press a demand for the popularisation of Consols, and it is suggested that the Post Office should be the medium of selling across the counter to the British public scrip for small amounts of Government Stock. There should be no book transactions with the public, and the scrip could be disposed of at the price of the day, when the owner wished to sell. The people who make this

demand usually show a lamentable amount of ignorance as to what the Post Office does in this matter. They argue as if there were no opportunities for the British public to invest in Consols in small amounts, as the French do in their own Government securities. It may come as a surprise to many people, who are inclined to entertain favourably the proposals I have mentioned, that considerably over £23,000,000 Stock is held already by depositors in the Post Office Savings Bank, and that the average amount credited to each person is about £140 Stock. The facilities for purchase and sale are as easy as it is possible to arrange.

There is also another consideration which should make the present system more valuable to the man of small means or the workman who wishes to invest in Government Stock. The purchase is registered in his name in the Stock registers of the Post Office. If he were to buy the Stock across the counter he would be handed the scrip or bond, and he would have the great responsibility on his shoulders of keeping it in a safe place. A great deal of the value of the Savings Bank to the working classes is that it takes care of their property: they get the money out of the house, where its presence is always an anxiety. Under the proposed arrangement the man would have to look after his scrip. A poor woman was asked why she despatched £100 in bank notes direct to the Controller of the Post Office Savings Bank without her book or any letter showing what she wanted done, or without even indicating whether she held an account at all. She simply replied, "I wanted to get it out of the house: the anxiety was wearing me to pieces lest it should be stolen, and I was told the Controller would take care of it for me." That is surely the supreme advantage which the Post Office system offers, and

it is a backward step to ask poor people to become again their own bankers, and in fact force them once more to the hiding of their treasure in the back garden or under the floors.

It is interesting to know that the small investors of the Post Office Savings Bank follow the rise and fall in the Stock markets with considerable keenness. A fall in price means an immediate increase in the number of investments, and of course with a rise the sales are similarly affected. Many, however, unfortunately invest in sheer ignorance of what they are doing, and the reputation of the Post Office suffers in their eyes when they lose by the transaction.

But let us get back to our imaginary depositor. If he wishes to withdraw from his deposit account a sum not exceeding £1, he can obtain it on demand from any post office on production of his book, and on his satisfying the paying officer of his identity as the depositor in the account. If he wishes to withdraw any sum by the ordinary means he forwards a notice of withdrawal to the Head Office in London, and he receives a warrant for the amount payable at any post office named by him.

If he is in urgent need of any sum not exceeding £10 he can, instead of forwarding by post a notice of withdrawal, telegraph for the money to the Head Office, and instructions will be sent by telegram to the local postmaster to pay him on production of his book and proof of identity. In out-of-the-way villages the paying officer is often a small tradesman who has a limited vocabulary and does not readily grasp the meaning of his instructions from headquarters. The meaning of the word "identity" was evidently misunderstood by one postmaster, who replied to the Head Office after paying money to a depositor, "The postmaster is quite

satisfied with the depositor, and finds no identity in him whatever." I cannot imagine to what ignominious examination the depositor was subjected, but as he was paid his money without establishing his identity, I presume he as well as the postmaster was satisfied.

A depositor can also purchase an Immediate or Deferred Annuity through the Post Office Savings Bank, and payments are made to him at his local post office. He can insure his life, and his premiums are paid by deductions from his deposit account. But this cannot be said to be a prosperous business. The Post Office is at a disadvantage compared with more popular Industrial Insurance Societies because of its steady refusal to employ canvassers.

Broadly speaking, these represent the chief advantages of an account in the Post Office Savings Bank, and the great principle which underlies the whole of the undertaking is that every transaction, in whatever corner of the United Kingdom it takes place, has to be registered at the Head Office in London. Every depositor's account is entered in a ledger, and the account must correspond exactly with his deposit book.

The average cost to the Department of every transaction is now about 5d., and it will readily be seen that after payment of 2½ per cent. interest, and allowing for thousands of small deposits and withdrawals, there is not much room for profit to the Government out of the business. For the funds of the Savings Bank are invested in Consols, and the reduction in the rate of interest on Consols from 3 per cent. to 2¾ per cent. and again to 2½ per cent. has seriously affected its revenue-producing capacity. But previous to 1896 a different tale was annually told, and the total surplus up to that year amounted to £1,598,767. Then in the years immediately preceding the South African War,

the price of Consols rose considerably above par, and the day of annual deficits began. A slight profit was again made in the years 1900–1902, but the rate of interest on Consols was then reduced to 2½ per cent., and there has been no appreciable recovery since. No Government seems inclined to make the obvious but unpopular move of reducing the interest allowed to depositors.

There is, however, another way of looking at the matter, which perhaps disposes us less to insist on the Department being managed entirely as a revenue-producing institution. The advantages to the public outweigh the comparatively small annual loss which is now sustained—the loss in 1909 was £50,481—and the primary object of the founders of Savings Banks was benevolence. The Post Office Savings Bank makes no such claim, but it does aspire to be a convenience to the people of this country.

The depositors are drawn from all classes of the country. Though originally intended for the benefit of the working classes, the conveniences provided appeal to almost everybody. The Post Office is always at hand in every village or town to receive small sums. Cheques are accepted for deposit, and it is found that many people use their accounts chiefly as a means by which they can dispose of crossed cheques received by them.

At the back of this huge undertaking is the credit of the nation: there is complete security for every depositor, and it is difficult to conceive of a run on the Savings Bank, although a very large number of the depositors are of that class which most readily succumbs to a panic.

The Head Office is at Blythe Road, West Kensington, and the size of the building can be imagined when

I say that the staff consists of 3263 persons, of whom 1826 are women. The Ledger Branch, in which every depositor's account is kept, is managed entirely by female clerks. The Correspondence and Account Branches are in the hands of the men clerks, and to them falls the duty of directing and advising the depositors as to their transactions. Much of the work provides an admirable index of the ways of the British people. It has been said that a man lays by money for a rainy day, but the experience of the Controller of the Post Office Savings Bank is that he more often lays money by for a fine day. Large sums are annually deposited, only to be withdrawn at the different Bank Holidays. At Christmas time the largest amounts are usually withdrawn, and then immediately afterwards, during the first weeks of January, under the influence of the good resolutions which are usually formed at this period, vast sums are deposited, and the largest number of new accounts are opened.

To the outsider the business of the Department may seem to consist mainly of the simple work of receiving and paying away money, but the correspondence with the public on matters arising out of their accounts is a huge item in the day's work. Correspondence is necessary on such subjects as depositors insane, depositors abroad, depositors married, husbands' claims, depositors deceased, lost deposit-books, fraudulent withdrawals, and "depositors apprehensive." The difficulties and perplexities of the British public on the subject of money are known to no person more fully than the Controller of the Post Office Savings Bank. He is sometimes tempted to wonder what are the benefits achieved by the Compulsory Education Acts. For instance a depositor writes: "I received from your General Post Office a paper containing all about Stock,

and I do not quite understand it, whether it is for land, corn, or silk stuffs. As I am taking up in it will you kindly write and let me know." Many farmers who are familiar only with one application of the word "Stock" have desired to make purchases of cattle through the medium of the Post Office. And one lady who had exceeded the amount allowed in her deposit account was asked if she would like to invest the excess in Stock, and she replied regretfully that her garden was already full up, and she had no room for more.

A depositor who had presumably suffered from recent fluctuations of price in the Stock market wrote a letter to the Controller and addressed the envelope: "The Roleing Stock Department, General Post Office." It was delivered in the first place, of course, to the Stores Department, General Post Office.

A large proportion of the depositors are still unable to read or write. A man, not connected with any Savings Bank account himself, wrote on behalf of a depositor and explained his action in this way: "I 'ad the whole business thro' my 'and cos he was an ilitrate." This is clearly a case where a little knowledge may produce a swollen head.

"I am married and wish to carry on as before," wrote a lady depositor. This is not the first time a daughter of Eve has made the effort to eat her cake and have it.

Friendly Societies, Provident and Charitable Societies, and Penny Banks are allowed to deposit under special concessions as regards limits, and vast sums are dealt with annually in this way. Large numbers of these societies are managed entirely by the working people themselves, and the rules which are drawn up have to be approved by the Department before any money can be accepted. An application was once received from three trustees of a Friendly Society addressed to

the Postmaster-General, who was at the time Lord Wolverton. From the alterations in the letter it was apparent that much discussion had arisen as to the proper manner in which a letter to his Lordship signed by three persons should be commenced. "My Lord" was evidently considered ungrammatical, and the letter eventually started with the words "Our Lord." The effort to construct rules which shall pass muster with the Postmaster-General often appears to tax the members of the working class clubs considerably. Some try the grand style. "The objects of this club are the glory of God, the honour of the King, and the decent interment of our members." Not so bad for a small burial club. Better, perhaps, still is this from musicians: "That the objects of the band shall be to work for Christ's Kingdom, the Bankshire and West Mercia Tabernacle to have first claim on its services." Others endeavour to imitate legal phraseology with wonderful results. "Any member while on the funds carrying on his proper or improper occupation shall forfeit his benefit." It would evidently be no use to plead that though you had earned other money while receiving benefits your luck was due to having successfully backed a winner. But in most cases the rules are drawn up in the people's own idioms. For instance, "Our Society is in case if a member should have a Pig Die with the Swine Fever or any unnateral death so as to receive the worth of the Pig out of the Fonds of this Society. We are cheefly agriculteral laberers." I like the last touching confession. I like also the quiet assumption that the Postmaster-General will know what is the natural death of a pig.

"All our transactions with the General Post Office have been straight and above-board so far," wrote the secretary of a society, thus holding out grim possibilities of what might be expected in the future.

The Post Office Savings Bank

"Any member who has a complaint can give it to the under-mentioned gentlemen who were elected at the committee." So runs a rule of a working man's sick club, and it seems to me a far simpler plan than sending for the doctor.

"Help one another Infectious Diseases Club," is the pleasant name of another society.

But perhaps the most human documents of all are to be found in the correspondence relating to the claims of deceased depositors' representatives. In hundreds of cases there are to be found tragedy and comedy, and glimpses of what the struggle of life means to the working populations. All accounts under £100 of deceased depositors who have left no will have to be distributed by the Postmaster-General under the Statutes of Distribution, and a difficult matter this is sometimes in the case of large families. Payment of these small sums is also made on production of a will, and these documents are often pathetic as well as amusing. Here is one: "I leave everything to my wife. I did not know it was wrong to sell those hens. I will be a teetotaller as near as possible. I have said things which had no meaning." This was evidently written when the man was seriously ill, and we seem to understand at once his own little weaknesses as well as the trials of his wife. One likes especially the way he hedges about the drink question: there is evidently a chance of his recovery from the illness.

A mother on claiming the money deposited by her dead son was asked if the father were alive. "Father living but insignificant," was her illuminating reply. A claimant to the money of a deceased depositor explained his omission to furnish a correct list of the next of kin in this way: "Her relations are robbing

me through thick and thin, and I think it is my turn to start." The Department declined to admit the cogency of the argument.

A person on applying for an insurance through the Post Office Savings Bank was asked among other questions to state the cause of his father's death. His answer was: "I don't know; I can't remember; but it was nothing serious."

The son of a depositor claimed his father's money, but inquiries made by the Department revealed the fact that he was born before marriage, and consequently could not claim as next of kin. The claimant was delicately informed of his disqualification. He then tried to establish a claim as creditor of his father's estate, and sent in a bill containing the following item: "Shock to system on learning of my illegitimacy, £2, 5s." This is what the late President Kruger would have called "moral and intellectual damage."

Here is a bill for an Irish wake charged against the estate of a deceased depositor :—

Bought of —— Grocer, &c.

6 gallons of whisky	£5	8	0
2 bottles cordial	0	3	0
½ lb. tobacco	0	2	0
½ lb. tea	0	1	6
Drinks	0	0	8
	£5	15	2

Nobody can complain of the last charge being excessive, but we are curious to know to what use if not for drinking purposes the other liquids were put.

A man of advanced years applied in the Inquiry Office

of the Department for an annuity, and he was asked to produce some evidence of his age in the shape of a certificate of birth or of baptism. He said he had no certificate of birth in his possession, but it might be possible for him to obtain a certificate of his baptism. The official told him this would meet the case, and the man departed. At the end of a fortnight the old man returned with a certificate of his baptism; he had complied with the instructions, although the certificate showed that the ceremony had only taken place the preceding day. When the poor man realised that this did not remove the difficulty he was most unhappy: he said he had had great difficulty in obtaining the certificate, and certainly the commercial value he attached to the rite seemed to justify the clergyman's reluctance to baptize this man "of riper years."

The same unconsciousness of the importance of a religious ceremony is often observed in the case of people who consider themselves married though they have no certificate.

Many of the old Trustee Savings Banks have during the last twenty years transferred their funds to the Post Office, and when any particular bank is closing its doors officials from the Post Office Savings Bank attend to advise depositors who consent to their moneys being handed over. Here is a true conversation which took place when the Whitechapel Savings Bank was closing. There entered the bank a working man and a working woman.

Working Man. Mornin', sir; what I came to see yer abaht is just this 'ere. If I puts my little bit in the Post Horfice 'ow abaht 'er (*pointing to the lady*) when I dies? Will there be any trouble abaht payin' 'er? There ain't no kids.

Clerk. Of course you are married: in that case it would be all right.

Working Man (*doubtfully*). Married! don't exactly understand, sir.

Clerk. Well, have you got any marriage lines?

Working Man to Working Lady. 'Ave, we, Sal?

Working Lady (*confidently*). Na, not likely.

Working Man. Well, young man, it's like this 'ere; we've lived together twenty year: she's my missus, I'm 'er 'usband, and I wants 'er to 'ave my little bit when I goes aloft. Ain't that it, Sal?

Working Lady (*coyly*). Yus.

Clerk. Well, did you go to church to be married?

Working Lady. Get out; not likely.

Clerk. Did you go to a Registry Office?

Working Lady (*indignantly*). Not me.

Clerk. Well, you'll excuse me saying so, but you are not married.

Working Man (*puzzled*). I dunno; yer see my missus and I 'ave been twenty years together, and it's 'ard on 'er if she can't get this 'ere brass. Can't say as it ever occurred to us to go to church or a Horfice. What am I to do, young man?

Clerk. Why don't you get married?

Working Lady. 'Ow much does it cost?

Clerk. Oh, only a few shillings.

Working Man. Well, Sal, what do you think?

Working Lady (*tossing her head*). Oh, if it won't do us no 'arm, I 'spose we'd better.

Working Man. It'll make the money right for you, Sal.

Working Lady. Well, come on: it's all them thievish lawyers—it's another do to get money out of yer. The idea for the likes of us to go to church. Oh my!

But a week or two afterwards the couple returned and produced their marriage lines.

Working Man. Well, it's all right; we planked our money down, and we're wery much oblig'd to you for the suggestion. Sal's been a good 'un to me these 'ere twenty years, but it never occurred to us, or we'd 'a done it before. It jest made us both laugh outright when the parson chap harsks me if I'll 'ave 'er. It do seem ridic'lous, but the law is the law, and we ain't none the worse. Much obliged for the suggestion. Will you 'ave anythink, young man?

But the clerk with stern probity declined, and said magnificently, "I am glad you have done the right thing: it is what you ought to have done twenty years ago." The man he had evidently converted to a partial recognition of the value of Holy Matrimony, but he saw that the lady was hopeless from the first. The Savings Bank is evidently a powerful lieutenant to the Church in its insistence on the commercial benefits to be derived from baptism and matrimony.

The lost book is often a fruitful source of curious explanations and experiences. The moment when we start saving any money is of course one for much personal satisfaction. In some cases it may even induce wild exhilaration. A lady wrote to the Controller this delightful letter: "Having joined your Bank I put my Bank Book in the fire. Will you please see to it." Another depositor writes: "My wife and me was having some words and she broke the book in pieces." And yet another in the same vein: "Through a falling out with my wife she tore the Bank Book. I enclose the Relics." The husbands, however, do not always have it their own way, and one wife writes as follows: "I had a quarrel with my husband on the day I lost the book. He stole my book once before. He denied the same as he does now." We must admit that the evidence against him is merely circumstantial.

Another man takes a morbid view of the characters of church-goers. "As I left it in church I do not expect ever to get it back with some other matters." People have often complained of the want of privacy at our post offices when we desire to transact confidential business there. But we do not all suffer from shyness or modesty. A lady writes: "I was not aware that any leaves came out of my book. I was travelling about so much that I sewed it up in my stayes, and I never took it out except in the Post Office."

An old lady informed the Department that she had lost her book, which she said stood in her maiden name. When asked for her marriage certificate, she said she was not married, and explained, "I used to take very strong tea, which has made my memory bad." Perhaps it was a case of love's old dream.

Then the explanations which have to be furnished for differences of handwriting are often very human and amusing. For instance: "I am instructed by my Father to write and state the difference between his handwritings may have been the cause of his rheumatics." Those who saw the handwriting were not surprised. Another writes: "The difference in the riten is that I have been promoted." He was clearly not examined in orthography before his advancement. Another application for an explanation of difference in handwriting was met in a rather cryptic fashion. A medical certificate was forwarded: "This to certify that J. S., residing at ——, is suffering from an inflamed foot."

I have given enough instances to show how closely the Savings Bank comes into touch with the people. Indeed it is the most human, in its relations, of all the departments of the General Post Office. It looks more closely into the inner life of the man and woman:-

it possesses also the people's secrets, which are safe in its keeping.

Efforts have often been made to compare the saving habits of the British people with those of other countries, but little reliable guidance can be obtained from the comparative statistics of the various Postal Savings Banks. In some countries, there are more facilities for saving money in private institutions and public concerns; in others there are considerably less than in England. Still it is to be feared that the younger generation, especially in our large towns, do not save to any great extent. The temptations to spend are at every corner, and perhaps the best recommendation of the Post Office Savings Bank, in the eyes of the masses, is that withdrawals are easy. Many people would, however, like to see the old idea of a Savings Bank more strongly emphasised, not only by the people, but by the management. But this is a question of policy with which we have no concern.

I ought to add that the example of Great Britain in establishing Post Office Savings Banks has been followed in our colonies and in foreign countries. Many countries have systems modelled largely on our own, and in the case of several of our colonies, arrangements exist by means of which accounts can be transferred from the Savings Bank of the mother country to that of the colony.

Nor must I omit to mention the introduction of "Home Safes." The depositor places his small savings in the safe, the key of which is kept at the post office. When the amount has reached a substantial sum it is deposited in his Savings Bank account. This means increased opportunities for saving to the depositor, and economy to the Department.

CHAPTER XI

THE TELEGRAPH

THE modern world is almost losing its capacity for astonishment. The rapid advances of applied science, more particularly in the manipulation of that force to which we have given the name of electricity, but the origin and essence of which are unknown and wrapped in the deepest mystery, almost took away the breaths of a previous generation, but they leave us comparatively unmoved. We feel, perhaps, that we are only on the eve of still more astounding discoveries.

Applied telegraphy dates practically from the year 1835, when Messrs Cooke and Wheatstone collaborated and presented to the world their five-needle telegraph system, requiring five-line wires, and since then rapid strides have been made, chiefly in connection with telegraphic apparatus. The five-needle system soon gave place to the double needle, an exceedingly useful instrument with two-line wires, and to the single needle with one wire. Then followed at successive intervals the Wheatstone A B C, Bright's Bell, Morse's Printer and Sounder (the most generally adopted hand-worked system of to-day), the Wheatstone Automatic, the Hughes Recorder, the Baudot, and other and more recent systems of direct printing telegraphy, such as the Creed and the Murray Multiplex. Finally wireless telegraphy was introduced, and its uses and capacities are in process of development. At first the use of the telegraph was almost entirely confined to railways, and

it was not until 1846 that a private company was formed to undertake the business of transmitting telegrams. Various other companies followed in succeeding years, but considerable dissatisfaction was felt at the inequalities of service and rates which prevailed. Small towns were neglected, and as the telegraph lines followed the railways, many places were not served at all. It was becoming more and more evident that a uniform system under one administration was a public need.

In the year 1868 an Act was passed empowering her Majesty's Postmaster-General to acquire, work, and maintain electric telegraphs, and two years later the business and interests of the several telegraph companies were taken over by the State. There can be no question that this measure, which entailed a considerable monetary outlay at the commencement, has been of immense value to the general public. The purchase of the telegraphs by the State was a huge undertaking, but in many respects it was mismanaged by Parliament as well as by officials. For instance, the story of the cable to Scilly is a concrete example of how the public were fleeced. All inland telegraphs in existence on a given day were to be taken over on the terms and conditions laid down in the Act of Parliament. Three joint-stock companies were immediately formed—the Guernsey and Jersey, the Shetland, and Scilly Islands Companies; and they went to work "hammer and tongs" to get their cables laid before they could be stopped by the provisions of the Bill which was then being carried through Parliament. It was touch and go with these bastard companies, and the effort made to lay the Scilly cable is very amusing reading. Owing to bad pilotage every inch of the cable was expended before the operators got

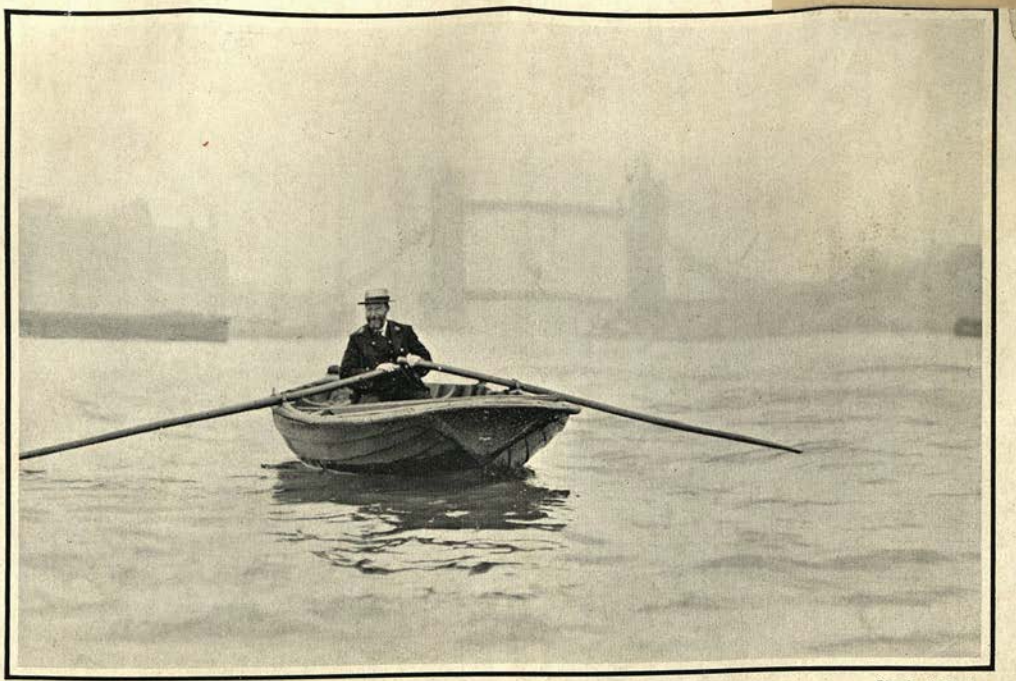
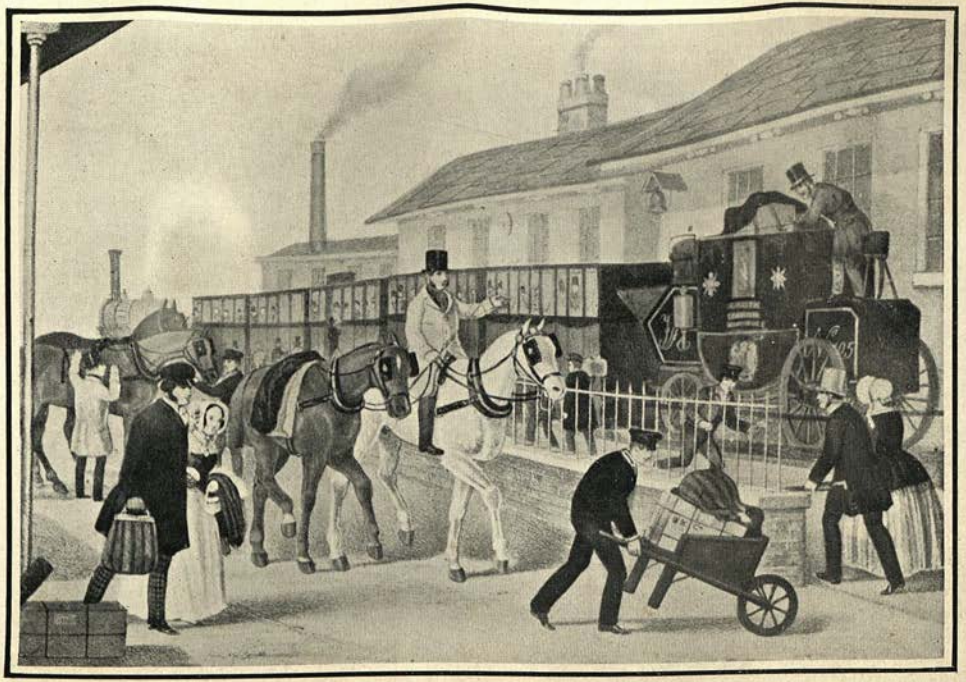


Photo *Clarke & Hyde.*

THE RIVER POSTMAN.

Numbers of letters have to be delivered to the various vessels anchored within the port of London, and the postman is seen here on one of his rounds.



MAIL COACH AND TRAIN.

When railways were in their infancy part of the journey of a mail was sometimes performed by coach and part by train. At the point where the railway began the coach was placed on a truck, which was coupled to the train.



THE WOODPECKER AND THE TELEGRAPH POST.

Several instances occurred some time ago of injury to telegraph poles in the neighbourhood of Shipston on Stour, caused by large holes being driven into and almost through them. The offender was discovered to be simply a woodpecker. The bird is thought to have imagined that the humming of the wires indicated insects.

within five miles of the islands. Now unless the cable could be laid and certified as being in working order within a given number of days they would not be allowed to land at all. The electrician in charge cut the cable a few fathoms from the ship and steamed into Scilly towing the "fag end" behind. "It was a gala day with the Scillonians." It was the dawn of a new era to them. They kept high festival, and the shore end was landed and hauled up over the cliffs by willing hands. And then, wonderful to relate, with the two ends of the cable lying several miles apart at the bottom of the Channel, the clever electrician produced messages printed in plain characters on the Morse slip, and on the faith of these signals the contractors issued their certificate. The inventive genius of the electrician had saved the situation. The Scilly cable was "in being," and would have to be reckoned with when the time came for purchase.

The united cost of the transfer had been seriously under-estimated, and the telegraph service has always been more or less burdened by the expenditure incurred at the outset. The transfer, however, has been a great boon to the nation, and has enabled the postal and telegraph system of Great Britain and Ireland to become the largest and most complete organisation for the transmission of messages in the world. The immense increase in business would, however, have been impossible but for the advances made since the transfer in telegraphic apparatus, and in wire values, such as the introduction of the duplex, quadruplex, and multiplex systems, which allow of a single wire being electrically split up for the simultaneous transmission of a number of currents.

Previous to 1870 the number of telegraph offices in the United Kingdom was approximately 3000, as

against 13,520 at the present day. The total number of messages dealt with in the time of the companies amounted to between six and seven millions annually. At the present time upwards of eighty-six million telegrams are dealt with annually.

The charges were high compared with the present time, as much as 7s. 6d. being required for a twenty-word telegram to Liverpool in the fifties, and later the average cost of a telegram to the public was 2s. 2d. per message.

On the transfer of the telegraph to the State a uniform rate of 1s. was introduced, and on the 1st October 1886 a further reduction to a minimum charge of 6d. for twelve words was made. The average cost to the public now is about 7¾d. per message. But the reduction to 6d., great as the gain to the public has been, is not profitable to the Department, and the revenue has suffered considerably. The transfer was also responsible for a considerable reduction in the rates for the Press, 1s. being charged for every 100 words transmitted between 6 P.M. and 9 A.M., and 1s. for every 75 words between 9 A.M. and 6 P.M., with 2d. for 100 or 75 words for each additional address.

In the days before the transfer, clerks in charge of telegraphic stations were forbidden to forward telegrams for the Press unless they were prepaid at the ordinary message rates, or unless they had received written instructions from the Secretary of the Company to allow certain messages to go at a different rate, or without prepayment. There was uncertainty and inequality of treatment everywhere, and the Press has perhaps gained more by the transfer than even the public. Foreign rates were also very high compared with those in existence to-day.

In the time of the companies a free delivery of a

telegram extended only to a distance of half a mile. For distances beyond and within a mile a porterage fee of 6d. was charged, with 6d. for every additional mile, with increased rates for express delivery.

At the present time telegrams are delivered free within three miles of the office nearest the address, which is called the Terminal Office, and when that office is a Head Post Office, no charge is made for delivery within the town postal area, even if that extends for more than three miles. No charge is therefore made for delivery within the whole of the London postal area, which extends as far as Southgate, Woodford, Lee, South Norwood, Wimbledon, Hanwell, and Wheatstone.

Before the transfer, important towns such as Bournemouth, Dundee, Exeter, Inverness, Limerick, Scarborough, or Wolverhampton did not work directly to London, and as a consequence communication had to be gained by a number of re-transmissions and transferences over the various companies' lines. Serious delay often ensued. Now, however, the Central Telegraph Office in London, which is more particularly a transmitting centre, has direct communication with every town of importance in the United Kingdom, and with every telegraph office in the metropolis. The direct communication between provincial towns has also greatly increased. Even now, when there are breakdowns, the transmitting of messages sometimes exhibits curious results in re-transmission. Mr. Baines remembers messages being sent during a breakdown from London to Carlisle through Sligo thus: London to Dublin *via* Haverfordwest and Waterford, Dublin to Sligo, Sligo to Belfast, Belfast to Glasgow, and Glasgow to Carlisle. There is also a legend in the Central Telegraph Office that the wires to the

North being stopped on one occasion, an urgent message from London to Newcastle was forwarded by way of Hamburg. Another story is of a special correspondent who, being unable to gain admittance into a newspaper office in Fleet Street, went to the Central Telegraph Office, and telegraphed to the Irish end of the special telegraph wire worked from the newspaper office to Ireland, requesting the Irish clerk to tell the Fleet Street clerk to come down and open the door.

Direct communication has also been considerably extended to continental towns. In 1889 the Post Office took over the working of the Submarine Company's cables, and direct communication is now established with a large number of foreign towns. At the present time there are some sixty wires with an aggregate of ninety-five available channels to the Continent. Five additional wires (six channels) are worked from Liverpool to towns in Belgium, France, and Germany, two wires are leased to the Anglo-American Telegraph Company for working to Belgium and Holland, and two to the Indo-European Telegraph Company for transmission of their traffic to South Russia, India, and countries beyond, *via* Germany. The remainder are worked from the cable room of the Central Telegraph Office in London to Austria, Hungary, Belgium, France, Germany, Holland, Italy and Switzerland.

The Hughes simplex and duplex apparatus is chiefly used for cable working. Some of the Hughes duplex circuits not infrequently deal with 150 telegrams hourly, and even this number has been exceeded. A Baudot circuit working four "arms" has at times of pressure disposed of from 250 to 300 telegrams in an hour. The annual daily traffic in telegrams to and from the Continent about the year 1870 was between 4000 and 5000:

at the present time it is from 24,000 to 26,000 telegrams. In addition to this, some 3500 telegrams are daily handed over to the cable companies, with whose offices in London there are connecting pneumatic tubes.

Now to deal successfully with the vast amount of telegraph traffic which passes throughout the United Kingdom and to and from the Continent it is of course essential that there should be one large depôt to act as the chief transmitting centre. This is naturally London, the capital of the British Isles. The first Central Telegraph Station was established about the year 1850 by the Electric Telegraph Company in Founder's Court, Lothbury. In 1860 larger premises were built in Telegraph Street, just off Moorgate Street, E.C., and at the time of the transfer, and up to January 1874, this building remained the Central Office. The rapid extension of business soon made a move necessary, and the staff and wires were transferred in 1874 to the new building in St. Martin's le Grand. It was thought that the spacious third floor in that building would be more than sufficient for that purpose for many years, but at the present time almost every portion of the big building is devoted to telegraphs.

The large central hall facing the main entrance to the building is set apart for the circulation of telegrams received from the various branch offices connected with the Central Office by pneumatic tube, and in the reverse directions for delivery from these offices. A large staff of telegraphists is engaged upon this work. The pneumatic tubes used for forwarding and receiving telegrams to and from certain branch offices in the city, western central, and western district offices, and so obviating telegraphic transmissions, are led into this hall. These tubes are laid at the depth of about two feet underground. They extend as far distant as

Billingsgate on the eastern side, House of Commons and West Strand on the south-western side, and the western district office on the western side, and allow of the rapid collection and distribution of telegrams over a very busy area. The tubes make the various offices arms practically of the Central Station so far as telegrams are concerned. The message forms are enclosed in gutta-percha carriers covered with felt, and having attached to their forward ends a number of felt discs which exactly fit the internal circumference of the tubes and prevent any escape of air around them. An elastic band at the mouth of the carrier prevents the messages from escaping. The outgoing carriers containing the messages are propelled through the tubes from the Central Office by forcing compressed air into the tubes behind them at a pressure of about 10 lbs. to the square inch, the incoming carriers being drawn through by vacuum, so that the normal atmosphere exerts behind them a pressure of about 7 lbs. to the square inch.

All the tubes are worked on the block system, and by an electrical contrivance the traffic is regulated. In long-distance tubes delay would arise if it were only possible for one carrier to be in the tube at one time, and to meet this intermediate automatic signallers are inserted at various distances in the tube, so that as soon as a carrier passes one section, it automatically notifies the sending section, enabling a second carrier to be inserted. Thus several carriers equidistant from each other may be passing through the one tube at the same time. The power by which these tubes are worked is derived from large compound pneumatic pumping engines fitted in the basement, but eventually the power station which has recently been established at Blackfriars will supply the power required. There

are at present thirty-seven pneumatic tubes connecting the various branch offices with the Central Office, in addition to seven which connect the offices of the various cable companies with the cable room.

Adjoining the central hall are the phonogram and the tube switch rooms. The former is set apart for telephone telegram business, and by its means telephone subscribers may speak direct into the head telegraph office. In this way they can dictate telegrams by telephone for subsequent transmission by telegraph. Telegrams are also sent in the opposite direction to certain subscribers who desire to receive their telegrams by telephone instead of by hand delivery from the nearest delivery office. The telephone circuits connecting the Post Office Savings Bank at West Kensington with St. Martin's le Grand, and used in connection with Savings Bank withdrawal telegrams, are also situated in this room.

In the tube switch room are placed circuits which enable telegrams received by pneumatic tube from the various branch offices to be signalled to officers in the Metropolitan District through the medium of the inter-communication switch which I shall mention later on. It also allows for the reception of telegrams originating at offices of the Metropolitan District intended for delivery from those offices connected to the Central Telegraph Office by tube.

The counter and delivery rooms are also on this floor.

The first floor, with the exception of one large room used as the telegraph school of instruction, is mainly occupied with the offices of the engineer-in-chief and his staff and the chief medical officer and his staff.

The second floor provides for the telegraph administrative offices, the cable room, and for wires working to provincial offices.

The third floor is devoted to the large central gallery and its wings, and here are placed the greater number of the provincial circuits. In addition the wires set apart for news working and for special events, to grand stands at race-courses, &c., are located here.

The Metropolitan and Home District circuits are on the fourth floor.

Now in order to combine the various floors so as to form practically one immense gallery, it is of course necessary that there should be a rapid means of communication between them. This is provided for by an extensive system of pneumatic house tubes, which makes it possible for telegrams to be circulated from point to point in the various galleries. For instance, it is assumed that a telegram is handed in at the Fenchurch Street branch office for transmission to Birmingham. This would in the first instance reach the tube hall on the ground floor by pneumatic tube. It would then be placed on the sorting table and taken to the tube connected with the central circulation table in the provincial gallery on the third floor. On arrival there it would be further sorted and taken to the section in which the Birmingham circuits are placed, and take its turn with other messages awaiting transmission to that town.

The area of each floor is so great that it is essential that the various circulation tables at particular points thereon should be directly connected by tube, thus allowing of the rapid transit of the traffic and preventing the confusion which would attend carriage by hand from point to point. In all sixty-eight house pneumatic tubes are worked throughout the day. In addition, continuous aerial cord carriers worked by electric motors are used for the conveyance of telegrams.

For the purposes of circulation, and for staffing and

effective supervision, the three floors or galleries are divided into sections or divisions. For instance, the provincial galleries are composed of seven divisions, named respectively A to G, and the various circuits are grouped as geographically as possible in these divisions. The A Division embraces such south-easterly and south-westerly towns as Dover, Folkestone, Brighton, Bournemouth, Basingstoke, and Ventnor, and so on. In addition to these divisions there are the News Division, the Special Section, and the Intelligence Section. The former contains the news circuits over which press work is disseminated throughout the Kingdom. The apparatus in use for this class of traffic is the Wheatstone Automatic, which in the course of years has been so improved that whereas in 1870 it was only capable of transmitting some 80 or 100 words per minute, it is now possible, given good wire conditions, to attain a speed of 400 words per minute, although for working purposes it is not usual to exceed an average speed of from 200 to 250. This system is specially adapted for the transmission of general news, one batch of which, on specially prepared slips, is often forwarded to many different towns. A large proportion of this particular traffic is classified, being news of general interest, and is handed to the Department by the different news agencies, such as the Press Association, the Central News, the Exchange Telegraph Company, &c., for dissemination to the various subscribers in different towns.

Air pressure is largely employed in perforating with the requisite Morse characters the slips by which the Wheatstone transmitters are fed, and by this means a number of duplicate slips can be prepared at one operation. Stick punching is also employed, but

more recently other systems have been introduced, such as the Creed and the Gell. These have keyboards similar to that of a typewriter with increased signs, &c.; but whereas, in using the ordinary hand perforator, each dot and dash of the Morse characters require to be separately made by the operator, the improved systems provide the required perforated Morse signals complete for every letter of the alphabet on the slip or ribbon, as each letter of the keyboard is depressed. The power employed is obtained by means of electric motors.

In the Special Section are placed spare sets of apparatus, and when race meetings, important political meetings, and other events of a special nature, such as a football final, university boat race, &c., are being held, the wires connecting the various towns and places of venue are temporarily joined to these spare sets, and the work is thus specialised and dealt with in this particular section. By this means it is promptly and effectively handled.

Adjoining the Special Section is the Intelligence Section, and here all the classified news work is dealt with.

It should perhaps be mentioned, that at many of the important race meetings, and special events, what is called the YQ system is adopted at the grand stand office, or telegraph office, in the town where the event is taking place. For instance, at the Ascot races a YQ wire would be fitted to several important towns, and those towns would be simultaneously served with the news supply, thus obviating re-transmission to London. A "special event" staff is withdrawn from London and other of the more important provincial offices and drafted to the place where the race or meeting is taking place. During such times as they are

withdrawn from headquarters the various officers receive special *per diem* allowances.

Mention has already been made of the increased wire values obtained by the introduction of the duplex and quadruplex systems. Duplex and quadruplex allow of two and four messages respectively being signalled at the same time over one wire, one message in each direction in the case of duplex and two each way in that of quadruplex. The "Baudot" system, which in addition to being made use of for continental working has been recently introduced for inland working between London and Birmingham, allows of six telegrams being signalled simultaneously over one wire. This system, like the Hughes, which is also now used for inland working to Liverpool, Manchester, and Glasgow, ensures direct printing and does away with the transcription of Morse characters. There is little doubt that the use of the "Baudot" system will be extended between London and the more important towns and to continental working. The Wheatstone Automatic system has recently been arranged for continuous working, and is now in operation between London and a number of large towns.

Another system, the Creed, an adaptation of the Wheatstone transmitter and typewriter, has been introduced. This is also a direct printing apparatus, and does away with the hand transcription of Morse signals.

Long-distance telegraphy has been considerably improved by means of repeaters placed at convenient intervals along the line, and these automatically retransmit the signals.

Up to the year 1903 all the circuits in the Metropolitan District worked directly into the Central Telegraph Office, and it was essential for a telegram handed in, say, at Shepherd's Bush for delivery at Leytonstone to be

signalled to the Central Office, transcribed there, circulated to the Leytonstone circuit, and transmitted from there. This necessitated a number of handlings at the Central Office. On the 5th January 1903, however, a system of through switching was inaugurated, and re-transmission obviated, so that now all that has to be done is for the office of origin to be switched through at the Central Office to the delivery office, and the telegram from one office to the other is signalled direct. The system of inter-communication has been very successful, and has not only greatly facilitated the transmission of this class of traffic, but has effected considerably economy in staff, stationery, &c. Direct switching of Metropolitan offices on to working sets in the provincial galleries has also been established. This enables telegrams to be received therein for onward transmission to provincial offices and *vice versâ*, so doing away with the greater portion of the local tubing and circulation which was necessary when all Metropolitan telegrams were received at the Central Telegraph Office on one floor only.

Recently two concentrator switches have been established in the "H" and "I" Divisions on the fourth floor, and the wires connecting a large number of offices within a limited distance of London have been led thereto. The arrangement is as follows. Assuming Hatfield has a telegram with destination Leeds, the Central Office is called. This call is indicated on the concentrator by a glow light, and the board operator plugs the sending office through to one of the adjacent working sets of apparatus, where the telegram is received, circulated to the Leeds circuit, and transmitted. This system, by obviating separate apparatus and staff for each circuit, has resulted in considerable economy.

On the closing of a large number of the less important

wires at night, and on Sundays, it is essential for reasons of economy that the circuits then open should not extend over so large an area as at busy times. They are therefore grouped together in small sections, the provincial offices on the third, and the Metropolitan on the fourth floor.

The current by which the whole of the circuits are worked at the Central Telegraph Office is generated at the Blackfriars Power Station, and conveyed by mains to the basement of the building, where the accumulators are charged, and the current distributed from these to the circuits.

I have been obliged to give a large number of somewhat technical details, and it would be almost impossible to describe the work of the Central Telegraph Office in any other way. But enough has been said in this chapter to bring out clearly the fact that in working the telegraphs the servants of the General Post Office keep in touch with the advance of science, and are not slow to avail themselves of every discovery which will benefit and add to the efficiency of the Service.

CHAPTER XII

THE TELEGRAPH (*continued*)

A VERY important matter in connection with the Service is the timing of telegrams, and in order to provide for their correct and uniform timing throughout the United Kingdom, Greenwich mean time, which is received from the Observatory hourly, is distributed from the Central Office at 9 and 10 A.M. daily. To enable this to be done, one circuit to every office excepting certain principal towns is stopped just before 9 or 10 A.M. daily, and, as the gong sounds at these hours, the signal "nine" or "ten" is transmitted to the offices in direct communication with the Central Office, and these offices retransmit the signal to the smaller offices connected with them by telegraph. The exceptions I have mentioned are served by means of the chronefer. Two such instruments are situated on the third floor provincial gallery, and daily transmit automatically a current received directly from Greenwich Observatory, one to the principal towns at 10 A.M., and the other to certain selected towns at 1 P.M.

Magnetic clocks are now used throughout the galleries, and allow of uniformity of timing.

Now let me deal with the practical working of the Service. The introduction of the sixpenny minimum rate for inland telegrams in 1885 led to an immediate large increase, particularly in the social class of telegrams. The average number dealt with during the month previous to the reduced rate was 52,000. A

month later, the total reached 70,000, and these numbers have gone on increasing until at the present time the daily number dealt with ranges between 120,000 and 165,000. On certain occasions these totals are greatly exceeded. For instance, on the 25th June 1902, the date when it was announced that the coronation of King Edward was postponed, the record total of 314,116 was reached. These totals represent ordinary telegrams, but in addition a considerable quantity of news or press matter is dealt with, and frequently, on busy parliamentary nights, as many as half a million words are dealt with. For many years the news record for any one night was 1,050,000 words, the occasion being the introduction of Mr. Gladstone's first Home Rule Bill in 1886; but on the 5th December 1910, just before the General Election, as many as 1,885,400 words were estimated to have been dealt with. They were chiefly speeches delivered in various parts of the country by parliamentary candidates. The total number of telegrams dealt with at the Central Telegraph Office during the year 1910, including continental and press messages, was upwards of 42,000,000.

A General Election, as may be imagined, throws an enormous quantity of work upon the postal telegraphs and the Central Telegraph Office, the chief transmitting and delivering office in particular. At the beginning of the election campaign the leaders of each party address meetings in various parts of the country, and as each speech for reporting purposes varies from a half to several columns of a newspaper, the reception and distribution to the London and provincial newspapers requires very careful and extensive arrangements. A special staff, fast-speed apparatus, and extra wires have very frequently to be provided for the particular town in which each speech is delivered.

The Telegraph

It sometimes happens that more than twenty speeches are delivered throughout the country on the same night. On their receipt at the Central Office they have to be transcribed for delivery to the various London subscribers, and for transmission to the principal towns in the United Kingdom for the newspapers. Sometimes it is found possible to relieve the Central Office of some portion of the re-transmitted work by utilising the YQ system, and distributing the traffic to the principal centres in the Kingdom. During the first two weeks of the General Election of December 1910, 15,210,600 words were dealt with at the Central Office.

The reception and transmission of polling results require careful treatment. The results are received by carefully skilled operators, and immediately taken in hand for distribution to a large number of towns for delivery to press agencies, subscribers, newspapers, clubs, &c. The making up of direct wires to the polling towns when required, in order that the result may be received in London in the shortest possible time, involves care and forethought. As an example of the celerity with which such messages are dealt with, the telegram conveying a result was handed in at Listowel, in the West of Ireland, at 9.15 P.M., and delivered to the press agents in London at 9.20 P.M.

Apart from the press work dealt with in the manner I have described, arrangements have been made by certain provincial newspapers for the leasing at a fixed rental of special or private wires from their London offices direct into the editorial offices, over which a vast amount of press matter is transmitted nightly.

Previous to 1885 the addresses of telegrams were signalled free. On the introduction of the sixpenny rate with charge for each word in the address, the public quickly recognised the advantage of registered

addresses. At the present time, in London alone there are no less than 31,000 registered telegraphic addresses.

The increase in the staff has of course been tremendous since the Post Office took over the telegraphs. At the time of the transfer the force consisted of 497 persons. At the present time the authorised staff is 4596 officers of all ranks, of whom 1214 are women.

The scales of pay for telegraphists in the Inland Section range from 16s. to 65s. per week for men, and from 14s. to 40s. for women. In the cable room, the men obtain an additional allowance of 2s. 6d. a week for knowledge of languages. An allowance of 3s. per week is granted to all telegraphists at twenty-five years of age who obtain first-class certificates in magnetism and electricity, and telegraphy or telephony, and who pass a certain degree of manipulative skill. In the case, however, of the cable room telegraphists the 2s. 6d. allowance is merged in that of the 3s. allowance. While undergoing training in the telegraph school, male learners receive 8s. and female learners 7s. a week. The scales of pay for overseers and supervising officers are of course higher. Salaries and wages absorb approximately half a million pounds annually.

The Stock Exchange and Threadneedle Street branch offices, which for all practical purposes are one and the same office, do a very considerable amount of business direct from the floor of "the House," and during times of exceptional activity of the Stock markets between 3000 and 5000 telegrams are handed in from the Stock Exchange between 11 A.M. and noon for onward delivery. The Threadneedle Street office is the busiest branch in the City.

In dealing with the vast number of telegrams which pass between the different offices in the United Kingdom it would, of course, not be humanly possible for all

to reach their destination without error. Everything possible is done to reduce the risk of telegraphic errors and failures, but where the condition of a wire is to some extent affected by climatic conditions, it is obvious that errors and failures may arise. On the whole, however, the percentage of errors to the number of telegrams dealt with is extremely small. Bad writing is often a source of error, and for this the senders are often to blame. To this cause might be attributed such an error as "Reserve me two stalls," being rendered to the addressee as "Reserve me two stables." But such an error as "Send three dog pies" instead of "Send three doz. pies" might have been caused either by bad writing, or by the failure of a dot in the signals for the last letter of the word.

While such errors have their humorous side, there are some which are distinctly tragic. For instance, the rendering of a message "Child dead" for "Child bad" is due to the signals for "de" being run together or inaccurately spaced.

Other sources of error are the incorrect transcribing of telegrams. For instance, in Cornwall there is a parish named Helland. The vicar was going to town, and hoped that his archdeacon could be induced to take the duty. The negotiations were entrusted to a brother clergyman and all went well. The latter despatched this telegram: "The Archdeacon of Cornwall is going to Helland. You need not return." The vicar received with astonishment this message: "The Archdeacon of Cornwall is going to Hell, and you need not return."

There is probably still a vast amount of ignorance prevailing as to the *modus operandi* of the telegraph. The use of the poles was once described as to hold up the wires and of the wires to hold up the poles. A simple maiden once said to her mother, "How do

the messages get past the poles without being torn?" And the knowing mother replied, "They are sent in a fluid state, my dear."

An old woman presented herself at the telegraph office at Waterloo Station and asked the clerk to write down a message to her son at Portsmouth. When this was done, she said, pointing to an advertisement in large type hanging in the office, "Would you mind sending it in print like that, as my son cannot read very well." I suppose many of us have as children watched the telegraph wires to see if we could detect any movement. The nursemaid of a telegraph official said to her mistress one day, "I do not think they are very busy where master is employed, because I have been standing on the railway bridge a long time without seeing one message go by." A young woman who was about to despatch a telegram was heard to remark to her companion, "I must write this out afresh, as I don't want Mrs. M—— to receive this untidy telegram."

When telegraph business was recently introduced into a village in Northamptonshire, most of the inhabitants spent a good portion of their time in watching the newly-erected wires. At length one old lady who had been especially diligent in her vigilance, was overheard remarking: "Wal, that's a rum un. I can hear them eer wires a hummin, but I ain't seen one of them eer yaller envelopes come up yet."

The limitation of twelve words for sixpence is often a severe lesson in brevity and compression. A happy lover was once cast into the deepest despair on receiving this telegram: "Come as soon as you can; I am dying—Kate." He went, found Kate alive and well, and she explained she had wanted to say she was dying to see him, but her twelve words had been exhausted: she thought he would understand.

To give another instance of a telegraphic error, a pleasure party telegraphed to some friends that they had arrived "all right," but the message was delivered as "all tight." And yet another story. A merchant away from home, learning of the illness of his wife, telegraphed to his family doctor for particulars. He received the following reply: "No danger; your wife has had a child. If we can keep her from having another to-night she will do well." Of course the letter "d" in child had been substituted for "l." The lady was suffering from a chill.

Many of the questions asked of the Secretary of the General Post Office in respect to the telegraph are not from *bona-fide* seekers after postal information, but are sometimes evidently from those who are engaged in newspaper competitions. For instance, the Secretary was thought the right and proper person to answer this question: "How long was the cable news being transmitted from England to America with the news of Iroquois winning the English Derby 1881?" But the Department provides special telegraphic facilities at race meetings, and the man may have thought that the Secretary was *ex officio* a racing man.

Another man wrote: "Sir, please would you kindly inform me what is the length of the highest telegraph pole under the General Post Office." The inquirer was found to be a foreman who had had a dispute on the subject with a number of his gang.

Telegraphy has held undisputed sway for a number of years, but latterly the telephone has entered largely into competition, and there can be little doubt that telephoning is and will become its very dangerous rival. While some considerable time may elapse before the effect of the trunk line telephony will make

itself felt in competition with telegraphy to provincial offices because of its somewhat high rates, it is possible that as these rates are reduced it will show its effects upon telegraphy. With regard to local telegrams, telephony has undoubtedly already brought about a diminution in the number dealt with by its vigorous competition, and unquestionably local telegraphy will have to look to its laurels now that the Government has taken over the National Telephone Company's system. At present, however, there is room for both services, and with the efforts which are continually being made to accelerate the telegraph service it is more than probable that both telegraphs and telephones, each serving the public in its own particular sphere, will together thrive and flourish for a long time yet.

Another company has recently sprung into existence and into competition with telephone telegraphy. This is the National Telewriter Company, which under licence by the Postmaster-General has rented junction lines enabling its subscribers to send telegrams from their offices direct into the Central Office for transmission onward, and also to receive them in the opposite direction, thus obviating the counter and hand delivery stages. This is on identical lines with the direct telephoning of telegrams, but whereas these are orally communicated, the telewriter instrument enables a facsimile reproduction of the sender's handwriting to be received. With this in use the joke in the young lady's remark about the untidiness of her telegram loses its point. The untidiness is reproduced. The company has at present six metallic currents with the Central Office, and in addition three wires are rented exclusively by private firms through the company, worked with telewriter apparatus.

Not many years ago the statement that before long

it might be possible to transmit and receive telegrams to and from ships at sea would have been received with incredulity. Wireless telegraphy, which is defined to mean any system of communication by telegraph without the aid of any wire connecting the points from and at which the messages are sent and received, has, however, made this possible, and to-day communication may be had through the General Post Office with ships passing round the coast by means of the Radio-Telegraphic service. Such telegrams can be accepted at any telegraph office for transmission to ships equipped with wireless apparatus through a number of coast stations in the United Kingdom and also through coast stations abroad. The charge for a "radio" sent through a British coast station is, with certain exceptions, 10½d. a word. Radio-telegrams can also be sent to certain ships through the long-distance stations of the Marconi Company at Clifden and Poldhui. This company retains its licence for its long-distance stations at these places, which are primarily intended for communication with America.

The number of radio-telegrams dealt with during the year ending 31st March 1910, at stations now in the hands of the Post Office, was in the outward direction to ships 3266, and inward from ships 27,727.

In addition to wireless communication with ships, there is also electrical communication with lighthouses, lightvessels, &c., round the coast, and shipping casualties at sea can now be reported to owners of ships from certain lighthouses and lightvessels.

Formerly all land lines were aerial, but more recently, in order to obviate the risk of interruption of wires by storms, it was decided to lay underground cables, and considerable progress has already been made in this direction. The underground backbone system extends

from London to the north *via* Birmingham, Warrington, Carlisle to Glasgow, thence to Edinburgh, and westward from London to Bristol, Exeter, Plymouth, and Penzance. From Warrington the system has been extended to Liverpool on the one side, and Manchester, Bradford, and Leeds on the other. Another section of underground cable has been laid between Newcastle and Stockton, and this will in course of time be extended to link up Leeds and Sheffield with the main system. It is possible that in the not very distant future the telegraph pole will go the way of the windmill and the tollgate, and be regarded by our children as a clumsy device of a comparatively dark age.

What is the future of communication by electricity? Who can tell? Let me quote some words of Sir William Preece, who as Engineer-in-Chief of the General Post Office for many years, was responsible for many advances in telegraphy which I have described. "One cannot help speculating as to what may occur through planetary space. Strange mysterious sounds are heard on all long telephone lines when the earth is used as a return, especially in the calm stillness of night. Earth currents are found in telegraph circuits, and the Aurora Borealis lights up our northern sky when the sun's atmosphere is disturbed by spots. The sun's surface must at such times be violently disturbed by electrical storms, and if oscillations are set up and radiated through space in sympathy with those required to affect telephones, it is not a wild dream to say that we may hear on this earth a thunderstorm in the sun. If any of the planets be populated with beings like ourselves, having the gift of language and the knowledge to adapt the great forces of Nature to their wants, then, if they could oscillate immense stores of electrical energy to and fro in telegraphic order, it would be possible for

us to hold commune by telephone with the people of Mars." If this condition of things does come to pass, I am quite sure that the General Post Office will be equal to the situation: they will add another floor to the building in St. Martin's le Grand to deal with the new business, and will issue regulations both for our guidance and that of the good people of Mars.

CHAPTER XIII

THE TELEPHONE

IF there was one thing more than another which must have seemed to our forefathers essential to conversation it was the presence of two or more individuals within what we call speaking distance of one another. Even in the cases where men have believed themselves to be in communication with the unseen world, the spirit with whom they held intercourse has been with them or near them. The one thing of which they could never have dreamed was, that in London you could talk rationally to a friend in Paris on the price of Consols or the state of the weather.

Yet the idea of the telephone is older than many of us think. Robert Hooke in 1667 described how by the aid of a tightly drawn wire bent in many angles, he propagated sound to a very considerable distance. Wheatstone in 1821 actually invented an instrument which he called a telephone, and in a criticism of this a journal made the remarkable prophecy: "And if music be capable of being thus conducted, perhaps words of speech may be susceptible of the same means of propagation." A still more significant prophecy was made by Charles Bousseul, a Frenchman, who said: "It is certain that in a more or less distant future speech will be transmitted by electricity. I have made experiments in this direction: they are delicate, and demand time and patience, but the approximations obtained promise a favourable result." Experiments

went on, the musical telephone was advanced considerably in effectiveness, but it was not until 1876, when Graham Bell patented his invention in the United States, that the speaking telephone was actually born.

It is a curious fact that Graham Bell's father, Alexander Melville Bell, was a teacher of elocution in Edinburgh; he was the author of numerous text-books on the art of speaking correctly. He was also the author of an ingenious sign language which he called "Visible Speech." Every letter in the alphabet of this language represented a certain action of the lips and tongue, and a new method was provided for those who wished to learn a foreign language or to speak their own language correctly. The son became, like his father, a teacher of elocution, learned in the art of voice production. He came to London, met among others Sir Charles Wheatstone, and was fired with ambition to follow in that great man's footsteps. He went to America, devoted himself to scientific study, fell in love, neglected his professional duties, and his future father-in-law refused his consent to the marriage unless he abandoned his "foolish telephone." Bell was not perhaps in the eyes of many of the fair sex an ideal lover, for he worked on and on until the great day of the 10th March 1876, when "the apparatus actually talked." He was too poor to pay for his own railway ticket to the Centennial Exposition in Philadephia to show off his instrument. It attracted at first but little attention until, such is the veneration for crowned heads in a republican country, it received notice from a royal visitor. Dom Pedro, the Emperor of Brazil, took up the receiver, and Bell went to the transmitter. In a few moments Dom Pedro exclaimed, with a look of utter amazement, "My God! it talks." This is what



Photo *Clarke & Hyde.*

THE TELEPHONE DETECTIVE.

The observation table at the great telephone exchange at the General Post Office. An observer is sitting with a split second stop watch in front of him. He records the exact time taken by operators to establish connection between subscribers, together with their treatment of subscribers.

everybody repeated who made the same experiment; it is what many are still saying to-day.

At the meeting of the British Association in the same year, Sir William Thomson gave his experiences at the Philadelphia Exhibition. "In the Canadian Department I heard 'To be or not to be . . . there's the rub' through an electric wire: but scorning monosyllables, the electric articulation rose to higher flights, and gave me passages taken at random from the New York newspapers. 'S.S. Cox has arrived' (I failed to make out the S.S. Cox). 'The City of New York,' 'Senator Morton,' 'the Senate has resolved to print a thousand extra copies.' 'The Americans in London have resolved to celebrate the coming 4th of July.' All this my own ears heard spoken to me with unmistakable distinctness by the then circular disc-armature of just such another little electro-magnet as I hold in my hand."

Mr. William Preece, who was in after years knighted, and who was at the time Divisional Engineer to the General Post Office, exhibited at this same meeting Bell's telephone, which he had brought from the United States, and Graham Bell himself gave further illustrations.

Mr. Preece was at that time watching the progress of the telephone with a keen eye for the interests of the Post Office, but so also were business men who saw a profitable opening for private enterprise. To put the matter briefly, the instrument was at once captured by private speculators and exploited for all it was worth and a good deal more besides. The Telephone Company, Limited, was formed in 1878 to acquire Bell's patent, and in 1879 the Edison Telephone Company of London was formed. By this time it was being generally discussed whether these people were not poaching on the manor of the Postmaster-

General. That official asked Parliament to insert a clause in a Telegraph Bill which was under discussion declaring that "the term 'telegraph' included any apparatus for transmitting messages or other communications with the aid of electricity, magnetism, or any like agency." But Parliament has usually a very tender heart for the private speculator, and refused to agree to this proposal. It is a habit with many ill-informed people to blame the officials of the Post Office for not collaring the telephone from the first, but if there were any blame attached to them it must be shared by Parliament. There was possibly in official circles a little jealousy of this new rival to the telegraph: it must be remembered that State telegraphs were yet in their infancy, and officials were still at work organising the new system all over the country at great expense to the State. We have seen in a previous chapter that just at the time when the mail coach service had been magnificently organised, and vast sums of money had been spent on improving the roads, the steam engine upset all the calculations of the postal officials. Something of the same kind seemed to be likely to happen in the case of the telephone and telegraph. It is easy to be wise after the event, but the telegraph was still a new toy in the hands of the postal officials, and their strongest efforts were being directed to improve this branch of the service.

But if the Post Office was not over enthusiastic in its welcome of the new medium it was at any rate keen in the assertion of its own rights. When the Edison Company announced its intention to start telephone business in London the Postmaster-General at once instituted proceedings against the company for infringement of his monopoly rights under the Telegraph Act of 1869. This was a test action, and

Mr. Justice Stephen, who was the judge, decided that the telephone was in the meaning of the Act a telegraph, and that telephone exchange business could not legally be carried out except by the Postmaster-General or with his consent. The decision covered also future inventions in regard to "every organised system of communication by means of wires according to any preconcerted system of signals." This, it has been said, was the psychological moment when the Government might then and there have taken advantage of its position and have incorporated the telephone with the telegraph system. But Great Britain acts cautiously in these matters, and as I have said she has an intense respect for private enterprise. It is only when competition between rival companies obviously fails to meet the wants of the public that she consents to allow her Government to step in and do the work itself. It was characteristic of our nation that divided counsels should so long have been allowed to continue over the telephone business; it was characteristic of our officials also, that they were not prepared to launch out into any fresh expenditure of public money with the purchase of the telegraphs still weighing heavily on their consciences.

Public opinion would not have allowed the Post Office to act the dog in the manger over the business, even if it desired to do so, and it proceeded to grant licences to the telephone companies to work within certain areas. In 1883 the Post Office did in fact propose to engage in active competition with the companies, but the Treasury opposed the policy on the ground that the State should at most be ready to supplement and not to supersede private enterprise.

The various telephone companies united in 1889 under the name of the National Telephone Company,

but their work was carried on under many restrictions. They were not allowed to lay wires underground, and for a long time they were not permitted to establish trunk lines. The Post Office was perhaps still inspired too much with the idea that it was a profit-making institution, and it was making a fight for the telegraph, with which the telephone was now in serious competition. Another opportunity for the Post Office to step in and buy out the companies happened in 1890, but it was not taken. But in 1892 the Post Office compelled the company to sell their trunk lines to the Government, leaving the local exchanges in the hands of the company. So things went on until 1898, when a Select Committee was appointed by Parliament to consider whether the telephone service is calculated to become of such general benefit as to justify its being undertaken by municipal and other local authorities, and if so, under what conditions. The decision of the Committee was that so long as the telephone service was not likely to become of general benefit the present practical monopoly in the hands of a private company should continue. The telephone, we see, was still considered only a luxury for the few, and although certain foreign countries were making great strides in the direction of a general use of the system, Parliament was not yet prepared to sacrifice the private speculator. The committee, however, recommended competition by the Post Office and local authorities, and in pursuance of this policy the Post Office in 1899 decided to establish a telephone system in London in competition with the company.

Thus began the first direct connection of the Post Office with the working of the telephone. But there is always something unsatisfactory and not in accord with the fitness of things when the State enters into

competition with any of its members in business undertakings, and this attempt was certainly not advantageous to anybody. In 1901 the Post Office came to an agreement with the company in regard to the London business. The company agreed to free intercommunication between its subscribers and those of the Post Office, and undertook to charge rates identical with those fixed by the Department. The long struggle of the company to obtain permission to lay underground wires was settled by the Post Office agreeing to provide these wires for the company at a rental. Finally the Post Office undertook to buy out the National Telephone Company in the year 1911.

Briefly stated, this is the story of how the Post Office came to possess, as was already the case with the telegraph, the working of the telephone. Even now there are persons who are of opinion that although there should be one single authority to work the telephone, this should not be the Post Office. Let me submit a few considerations why I think the right policy has been adopted. The telephone has undoubtedly become a formidable competitor to the telegraph, and it is desirable, with a view to the economical adjustment of facilities, that both systems should be under one direction. In this case the one service becomes the natural complement to the other, and one or the other can be developed or reduced as circumstances demand. Moreover, there are hundreds of miles of underground pipes all over the country laid at an expense of a million and a half, and a single cable may contain from 100 to 200 wires used indiscriminately for telegraph and telephone services. Many thousands of miles of route are furnished with poles used for both services.

Then there is the familiar illustration of the post

office existing in every village and town. What other authority would think of touching the unremunerative parts of the country, or would think it worth while to take up the business which the Post Office now undertakes as a matter of course? If the two services were separated all this plant and accommodation would have to be duplicated (or dropped) for telephones. All the work would have to be controlled by officials just as at present, with this difference, that they would be entirely free from the effects of popular criticism and control. Everybody claims the right to attack a Department of the State, and if their grievances are not attended to, the member of Parliament for their constituency can ask a question in the House of Commons. The Postmaster-General is considered fair game for attack by every telephone subscriber; far less satisfaction would be got out of a dispute with an official not directly responsible to Parliament.

A telephone subscriber, writing from the Junior Constitutional Club in reply to a pressing request for payment of subscription, wrote: "Anyhow, £5 is more easily paid than £8 at the present moment. I don't suppose the P.M.G. is quite so short for a day or two as I am."

And in a further letter he said: "It would be an act of grace on the part of an exalted and powerful man like the P.M.G. to show clemency under the cruel circumstances and forego his rights."

There would be no satisfaction in writing such letters from your club to the secretary of a company. To have the opportunity to be saucy to a member of his Majesty's Government is only given to some people when they make use of the Post Office.

Men point to the loss to the Post Office in working the telegraphs. "Is this not a proof of the inefficiency

of the permanent official?" But certain things should be remembered before making such accusations. What are the chief causes of the loss? Parliament insisted upon sixpenny telegrams, and they are certainly not remunerative; no private company would touch them at that price, except perhaps to certain towns and districts where the business would pay its way. The Post Office telegraphs everywhere at that price. Parliament also insisted upon cheap Press telegrams, which are a loss to the Post Office, though a great gain to the public. And as a contributory cause to the loss must be mentioned the telephone itself, which has to a certain extent destroyed the most remunerative portion of telegraph work, the transmission of short messages. Nearly every village has its telegraph. Numbers of offices are kept open all night. The railway companies have an immense free service over the whole Post Office system. But the man whose telephone service has for the moment gone wrong forgets all this, and in his indignation he attacks the whole system.

The United States is practically the only country of any importance in which the telephone system is not owned and worked by the State. The General Manager of the Post Office Telephone Service, who paid an official visit to the United States in 1910, in answer to an inquiry as to whether the service in New York is as good as it is usually represented to be, stated frankly that "the service given in New York City, where the telephone problems are similar to those that confront us in London, is unquestionably superior to ours. But," he added, "I believe that we are rapidly catching up, and I feel sure that at no distant date it will be commonly acknowledged that the service in London is equivalent to that of New York."

The Telephone

As regards the trunk lines and long-distance business in the United States, there are often complaints of high charges and other inconveniences, but the telephone service is developed there much more extensively than in Great Britain. The Americans suffer more than we do from cyclones and storms and interruptions to their telephone system. Everything is on a magnificent scale, even the weather. My readers may remember the story of the Scot who was explaining to an American what severe winters they experienced in his native country. "Why, it is nothing at all to the cold we have in the States," said the American. "I recollect one winter when a sheep jumping from a hillock to a field became suddenly frozen on the way, and stuck in the air like a mass of ice." "But," said the solemn Scot, whose first consideration is always love of the naked fact, "the law of gravity would not allow that." "I know that," was the ready answer, "but the law of gravity was frozen too." No wonder, with such possibilities, the American long-distance telephone service occasionally breaks down.

Technical terms are difficult to understand in this country, but America often helps us out of difficulties by her picturesque language. For instance, a "snooper in" is a person who listens to other people's conversations on the telephone. And "the trouble man" is an excellent name for the individual who investigates faults on a wire.

It is the long-distance calls which appeal most strongly to our sense of the marvellous. Owing to our insular position the extension of the range of telephonic speech has always been a difficult engineering problem, as the insertion of a length of submarine or underground cable in a telephone circuit has a "choking" effect, and materially limits the distance over which speech is

possible. In order to minimise this difficulty, which affects Great Britain so adversely, a cable treated with loading coils was laid in 1909 between Abbot's Cliff, Dover, and Cape Grisnez on the French coast. It is the resistance capacity and induction of a circuit which decides whether a long-distance conversation will be satisfactory or not, and the insertion of "loading coils" in a cable artificially increases the induction, thus increasing the volume and improving the quality of speech received at the end of a circuit in such a cable.

There are sometimes difficulties in the maintenance of a cable in a busy waterway like the English Channel, as it is no uncommon occurrence for vessels to foul cables with their anchors, and sometimes even in lifting the anchor the cable is heaved to the surface.

Everybody asks the question, "How far can I speak on the telephone?" In this country at least that will ultimately depend on the way the difficulties of the submarine cable are surmounted. You can talk in England to Paris and Brussels and many provincial towns in France and Belgium. The new cable has enabled telephonic communication to be made between Paris and Glasgow: Manchester can speak to Paris, Nottingham to Lyons, and Ipswich to Bordeaux. The engineers of the Post Office talk of the possibility of a conversation between London and Astrachan.

The scene at a large telephone exchange is very curious and striking. *The Daily Chronicle* some time ago gave a very vivid description of what meets the eye and ear when you enter the room. "A low, confused murmur falls pleasantly on the ear, with a dim suggestiveness of activity in being. It is like the hubbub of a far-off multitude or an echo of Babel heard through the electrophone. It is the negation of noise, and yet it bespeaks energy and meaning.

The Telephone

Around the room many girls are seated with their faces to the wall. On their heads a bright metal band is fastened, and against the hair of the brunettes it gleams like a barbaric ornament. With the intuition of womanhood these young ladies must be aware that this implement of their toil becomes them, for they carry it with a certain grace and coquetry. But they have no eyes for the intruder. All the time they are intent on something else, listening constantly to the voices of the unseen. All London is speaking to them —nay, all England. Though the voices are those of strangers, they respond readily and reply promptly to the words they hear. They are the intermediaries of communication, and they bring together millions who are miles apart. Heaven knows how much purposeless chatter they encourage, yet they also make possible the most momentous conversations, fraught with grave consequences to individuals and communities. Yet all the while they are calm and unmoved, speaking in a voice that is ever soft, gentle, and low—'an excellent thing in woman'—and they deftly handle coloured cards and push plugs into thousands of small holes in the framework before them. A few soft-footed superintendents walk up and down the room, but there is no sound to conflict with the murmurous harmony of subdued speech."

There are as many jokes about the use of strong words on the telephone as there are about golf and bad language. The telephone is always a trial to the impatient person. "Is there a doddering idiot on this telephone?" shouted an irascible old gentleman down the transmitter. "Not at this end," came the ready reply of the young lady at the exchange.

The ordinary rules which govern the art of conversation in polite circles do not fit in with the telephonic



Photo *Clarke & Hyde.*

THREE MINUTES' CONVERSATION BY TELEPHONE.

The calculagraph is a clock which registers the exact time occupied by each conversation. The operator depresses the handle on one side when the conversation begins, and depresses the other when the conversation is finished.

talk. When the conversation is to be abruptly broken off in three minutes it is something like endeavouring to pour out your soul on a sixpenny telegram.

The Daily Mail once published an article entitled "Learning Languages by Telephone," which laid the newspaper open to *Punch's* obvious retort that "telephone girls, we understand, have learnt quite a lot of language that way."

An employer and his office boy were having a conversation over the telephone, in the course of which the employer found it necessary to remonstrate with his employé and to express somewhat forcibly his opinion of the latter's actions or behaviour. At the conclusion of his master's remarks the boy inquired: "Are you done? Are you quite sure you are done? Well, all them names you called me you is."

The possibilities of the Post Office Telephone Service when fully developed are enormous. In the United States, for instance, there are to-day more telephones in use by farmers than the whole number in use by commercial and all other classes in the United Kingdom. And these telephones are found to add to the profits and comfort of the farmers to an extent which makes the cost of the telephone seem negligible.

The British Post Office, following the American example, has arranged that if a sufficient number of subscribers living on or near a country road leading to a town where there is a telephone exchange will agree to use one line, they can telephone as much as they please to people on that exchange for the moderate charge of £3 a year.

A British farmer can speak from his farm to all the country round. The telephone saves him inconvenient and expensive journeys to neighbouring towns, while

he and his family can talk to their friends and neighbours and can arrange social functions.

The proverbial dulness of the country-side may be relieved considerably by the development of the telephone system, and curious results may eventually be seen in our national habits in the future. With a talking instrument installed at every post office and perhaps every house, the whole nation may gradually accustom itself to social intercourse over the wires. The Scotsman may lose some of his reserve, and the Englishman much of his class feeling. On the other hand, the Irishman will find increased opportunities for his natural eloquence.

Shall we require in such circumstances to visit one another so frequently? Will railway receipts fall off? Will the taxi-cab wait in vain for a call? There is one certain thing the popularising of the telephone will effect—it will test the sincerity of our friend who protests that he is anxious to see us, and to be in our company. If this sentiment, as is often the case, arises merely out of a desire to hear himself talk, the man may simply use the telephone. We, too, have an advantage: we can cut him off.

CHAPTER XIV

ENGINEERS, STORES AND FACTORIES

(*a*) *The Engineers*

IN writing of the activities of the General Post Office, it is difficult to know where to stop, or in that slaughter of the innocents which must always take place when space is not available, to decide who is to be spared. We certainly cannot leave out the Post Office engineer. He often works unseen and unappreciated by the general public, but he has this consolation, that he is indispensable, and in the Post Office of the future he may become the most important man in the service. Sometimes, perhaps, our eye may have been arrested, when passing along a street, by the spectacle of a man apparently attempting acrobatic feats on the top of a telegraph pole, and he will often attract the same curious attention from a London crowd as a fallen horse or a motor car in difficulties. He is probably an employé of the Post Office, and belongs to the Engineer's Department.

For several centuries the Post Office was simply a carrier of letters, and it is difficult to realise that a larger portion of its effective work depends at the present day on the skill of the engineer. Since 1870 a sum of over £100,000,000 has been expended in the purchase, maintenance, and extension of telegraph and telephone business, and the expenditure on telephone maintenance alone up to the end of 1908 amounted to nearly £8,000,000.

Engineers, Stores and Factories

The engineers have during recent years provided a large mileage of underground wires, connecting London with Edinburgh, with the west of England, the Midlands and the south-eastern counties. The need for the engineer's work in the postal service is felt more and more every day. All round our coasts he is erecting and maintaining stations for wireless telegraphy, and if the aeroplane becomes the carrier eventually of our letters, the engineer will be the chief official in the postal as well as the telegraph work of the Post Office. Even now there is an increasing demand for mechanical appliances in postal work. There are the conveyors and stamping machines used in sorting office work, and new developments in this direction are probable in the future.

The Engineer-in-Chief's staff numbers about 300, but the Department controls a vast army of men, totalling 10,000, engaged in the manual labour connected with telegraph and telephone business. The importance of the Department is scarcely yet recognised even by the Administration of the General Post Office, which is, naturally, still disposed to run the business on non-mechanical lines, and possibly more importance is attached to old-established branches of the service. But the day of the engineer is arriving, and he will enter into his own before many years are over. Some day, perhaps, the Chief Engineer will be *ex-officio* the Chief Secretary. And when calculating machines become universal, he may easily become the Accountant-General also.

A mere layman, unversed in electrical science and technical terms, finds it extremely difficult to understand, except in the broadest outlines, the engineering work of the Post Office. The technicalities of the telegraph and the telephone are very difficult to explain, without

the use of scientific terms. We sympathise with the lady who was being told by a member of the Ordnance Survey how marvellously accurate were the results achieved by his Department. He spoke with enthusiasm, and told her how they started with a measured base several miles in length on Salisbury Plain, how they triangulated over the whole of England and Scotland, and finally had a similar base in Ireland. They then compared the actual length of that base with the length it should have had according to their calculations, and in a most impressive manner the Ordnance Survey man informed his companion that there was found a difference between them of nine inches.

The lady had listened with intentness, and with that appearance of understanding which is assumed so much more convincingly by a woman than by a man. "And did they have to do it all over again?" was the question she put to the engineering enthusiast!

If we are conducted through the instrument rooms of the General Post Office, we want to ask heaps of questions, probably, but we are like folk who have learnt enough of a foreign language to ask a question but not enough to understand the answer.

An engineer's work is not, however, wholly technical. In planning and organising telegraph or telephone routes many varied duties fall to his lot. What is called "wayleave getting" has in the past provided him with abundance of opportunities to show his skill in diplomacy. This particular work is the obtaining permission from owners of property and local authorities for telegraph lines and poles to be erected. When a member of the British public thinks the Government require something from him he may feel flattered, but he certainly hardens his heart and makes an effort to take advantage of the needs of the State. I

will give an instance of the sort of reception an engineer experiences when he is wayleave getting. A jobbing carpenter and coffin maker was approached with the idea of permitting a telegraph pole to be erected in his back garden. He did not particularly object to the pole, but he put up his back immediately when hearing of the sum offered by the Post Office. The engineer was eloquent about the matter being for the public good, but the man was inexorable. It was pointed out to him further that the Department paid a guinea for each of its poles, and that to give what the man demanded would be ruinous, especially as the telegraph branch was making no profit. The man replied, "Then all I can say is you look damned well on a concern as don't pay."

Another man did not particularly care to have the pole, but eventually consented. He said, however, that it would not be worth his while to collect the shilling which would be due to him. He was told he need not trouble to collect it himself, as the postman would bring it round. It was the Christmas season, and the man's indignation was aroused at the apparent slimness of the Post Office. "Ah, I see; I take with one hand and give it back with the other, to the postman for his Christmas box."

An engineer, seeing a man who appeared to be the proprietor of an estate, where some trees were interfering with the wires, asked permission of him to trim the branches. "No objection at all, my dear fellow; trim away as much as you like." This the officer did until the real proprietor came out and wanted to shoot the engineer. The other man, who was a stranger to the neighbourhood, in the meantime escaped.

Some people give way handsomely when they find there is no chance of standing out successfully. Under



Photo *Clarke & Hyde.*

UNDERGROUND TELEPHONE WIRES.

Underneath the streets of London are miles and miles of telephone wires. This is a section of the lines running beneath the Kingsway, and the operators are at work repairing the wires.

the Telegraph Construction Act (1908) the Department has certain powers of compulsion. Representations were made to a lady but she took no heed of them, and a notice was served on her by the Solicitor of the Department. She replied: "With reference to your communication respecting the erection of telegraph poles, &c., I am afraid I have not taken much interest in the matter, and I thought it was all finished long ago. The absurd fuss that was made some time ago seemed to cause my husband much amusement, and as he is letter scribbling, and has nothing else to do or think about, I handed the affair over to him to see to, as I did not think it of any importance. As far as I am concerned you can put 40,000 poles or anything else you like up down or all over the road: it is a matter of absolute indifference to me."

The laying of underground wires is, however, developing fast, but it is usually cheaper to keep the wires overhead, and in the present state of electrical science the effectiveness of a telephone wire is reduced when laid underground. In the Postmaster-General's Report for 1906 he deplored the differences into which he was forced with landowners, and "with those valuable associations whose care it is to preserve the natural beauty of the country. In the case of Hindhead I am glad to say that, thanks to the consideration shown by the Directors of the London and South-Western Railway, I was able to take the poles by another route." It is pleasant to find consideration for the beauty of the country influencing the policy of the Post Office. The Postmaster-General went on to say that "means of overcoming the present difficulties are urgently required; for it is most unsatisfactory that important towns should go for years with inadequate trunk telephone facilities because it

has not been possible to overcome some difficulty of wayleave many miles away." This was written before the Telegraph Construction Act of 1908 was passed, but even with increased powers the Department experiences great opposition from local authorities and others to the erection of overhead wires, and the wayleave getter's task is still difficult in many districts.

Another of the works carried out by the Engineer's Department is the establishment of a system of synchronisation of clocks by means of ingenious automatic appliances, and in this matter the Post Office has given a lead to the nation. At no distant date, if the example of the Post Office is followed, we may be spared the experience which frequently occurs in a London street, of finding a difference of time in almost every clock we pass. The Post Office clocks are like Wordsworth's cloud, they move together if they move at all.

(*b*) *Stores and Factories*

The Stores Department is another branch of the service which does not come under the direct notice of the public. But it is as necessary to the Post Office as the stoker is to the railway train. Stop the supplies and every post office in the country will feel the effect very quickly. Nothing is too small or insignificant to be supplied by the Stores. If a department wants a packet of pins it applies to the Stores: if it requires a safe or a telegraph pole the Stores will supply the article. If an official requires a uniform the Stores will fit him as well as a West End tailor. The business done is colossal; the figures of the Stores Department are in some respects the most interesting in the Post Office. They would move to envy firms like Selfridge's or Harrod's. For instance,

in one year 1,250,000 pens were supplied to the Postmaster-General, and yet, as Mr. Sydney Buxton complained pathetically when mentioning this fact publicly, his handwriting was no better. During the year 1909 more than £1,300,000 of goods were purchased by the Post Office, and £800,000 of this represented the cost of engineering stores.

Everything that is required in connection with postal and telegraph work is examined and tested before delivery. No fewer than 1,035,720 separate consignments of stores, weighing 6223 tons, are despatched from the Studd Street depôt annually. About 100,000 persons in the United Kingdom are supplied with uniform, and the total number of garments issued annually is about 420,000. The annual value of all this clothing amounts to about £210,000. As a rule everybody is allowed two suits, one for summer and one for winter wear, and they are made according to standard sizes. The method adopted is called the Fitting Sizes Scheme, and I shall refer to it in more detail in my chapter on the Postman.

The Department always holds large stocks of cloths, linings, tapes, braids, and buttons, and it issues them from time to time to its tailoring contractors. Think of a supply of three or four million buttons! The percentage of misfits is two.

Mail bags, parcel post receptacles, official bicycles, and telegraph instruments are supplied in large quantities. Over 11,000 bicycles, carriers, and trailers are in use throughout the Kingdom, and the mileage covered by them amounts to 150 million miles per year.

Miscellaneous postal stores, such as stamps, seals, scales, weights, telegraph paper, string, sealing-wax, are purchased by the Stores for the Post Office. Printed matter, pens, ink, paper, and office requisites,

though stocked and distributed by the Stores, are supplied by the Stationery Office, Whitehall. Household stores, that is materials for cleansing and cooking purposes, are supplied to the Post Office by the Board of Works. The Stores supply the General Post Office with red tape to the extent of 1,000,000 yards annually. The amount will not come as a surprise to many people, who may perhaps be inclined to say that the exports of red tape by the Post Office even exceeds the big import. Needless to say, the Stores only supply the article in its material form: they are content to allow the administrative branches to manufacture the other kind. Pencils are supplied to the tune of 1,000,000, and pens I have already mentioned. Again the critic may step in and say that if the average post office pen were renewed as often as it ought to be the order from the Stores would be still larger than it is. The stationery supplies are of course stupendous. Here are a few figures covering one year: 2200 gallons of gum, 4800 gallons of writing ink, 11,000 boxes of paper-fasteners, 4800 quires of blotting-paper. And you can get sealing wax in three qualities, and in hundredweights. But if I continue in this strain I shall turn the heads of my readers.

Closely allied to the Stores are the factories. Speaking broadly, the Post Office does not make the goods which it requires; it gets them for the most part from other firms: the goods are brought into the factories to be examined and tested, and the Stores distributes them throughout the Kingdom. A certain amount of manufacture does, however, take place at the factories. A quantity of telegraphic apparatus is made here: the supply and upkeep of thousands of miles of telegraphs and telephone lines has to be provided for. In one place you will find a machine, the

work of which consists in installing wires into cables: in another you will find a machine doing exactly the opposite kind of work, pulling cables to pieces that have had their day; the wires are untwisted, and the gutta-percha is stripped off. The insulators for the telegraph poles all come into the factory, and the arms on which they are to be fixed for the support of the wires are made here. They are of British oak or Australian karri-wood. All kind of fittings for postal and telegraph work, including silence cabinets for the telephone business, are constructed in the factory.

Repairs form a large part of the work. Here are awaiting repair, straps, postmen's bags and pouches, and the great bull hides—envelopes as they are called—in which the mail bags are wrapped to be dropped by the Travelling Post Office. Many of these are continually being brought into the factories to be repaired, rent and split up all to pieces, indicating the violence of the action which often takes place during the exchange of the bags.

Leather is used very much in postal appliances, and a large staff is employed making and repairing articles. Powerful sewing-machines are employed for the purpose. One curious industry is the making of the little felt and leather carriers which are used for the transmitting written telegrams and other papers through the pneumatic tubes. These are made by women. There are, as I have already pointed out, miles of these pneumatic tubes under the streets of London.

Here is a paint shop, also a smith's shop with steam blast and hammer. Basket-mending is very much in evidence. The Post Office uses thousands of baskets, many of which used to be made in prisons. The bulk, however, come from contractors, but the mending is done here.

When the articles have been tested the Stores undertake the delivery throughout the country.

One of the burning questions of the Post Office is the supply of telegraph poles. In the Post Office Circular of the 8th December 1908, the Postmaster-General invited his staff throughout the country to acquaint him of any promising sources of home-supplied timber. There was a time when the needs of the British Post Office were met solely from Norway. From the Norwegian forests came the poles which supported the overhead telegraphs of the United Kingdom. But at the present time there is a shrinkage in the supply from that quarter. The Post Office requires 40,000 poles per annum. Sweden has supplied us, and now Russia with her interminable and primeval forests sends us the poles. There are virgin forests in Russia in the White Sea Hinterland, but these are very dense, and it is sometimes very difficult to get out of them anything longer than 40 feet. The timbers used for telegraph "arms" are, however, imported from Australia.

An interesting fact about the supply of telegraph stores is that a General Election decided on at short notice involves an immediate order for 2600 instruments with accessory stores. The additional telegraph forms required reach high figures.

Arrangements are made to meet emergency requisitions due to telegraphic breakdowns, naval or military manœuvres, &c., and officers are frequently called from their home at night to despatch by the first means at their disposal the necessary instruments.

The returned stores form a large item of the business. Instruments get out of date as well as out of repair. These are examined by an officer, who decides whether they shall be sold complete, or broken

up and sold as brass, ebonite, &c. It pays to break up instruments, if, for example, they contain platinum, but on the other hand, for instruments such as bells, switches, &c., there is a limited demand, and these are sold in small lots by auction. It is a matter of some difficulty to determine, and it has frequently to be decided by experiment, what instruments can be broken up, and as the demand is very limited, how many complete instruments can be released from stock without affecting the price.

Storeboys do most of the breaking up of instruments, and useful parts are retained for stock. Nobody can be relied on to break up anything with more of the joy of life than a boy. Lead-covered cable is stripped in the factories for sale as copper and lead, and gutta-percha for sale as copper wire and gutta-percha strippings. Superintending Engineers throughout the country are allowed to sell locally certain stores such as old iron, iron wire, and poles, but other valuable stores are sent to London for disposal.

There are two or three general tender sales of old stores in the year, and special sales of copper and lead are arranged whenever the accumulations or the state of the market require it. But the scrap-heap of the Post Office is of the dimensions of a mountain.

There are also returned postal stores, which come under the name of condemned material. These are sold for what they will fetch. In one year the Department obtained £1800 for clothing and rags, £850 for string, and £700 for boots. Accumulations of used string are disposed of also locally by certain postmasters. Here is indeed an example in domestic economy.

The Stores supply in response to requisitions a quantity of postal stores to the Colonies and British post offices abroad. There are British post offices at Ascension,

Beyrout, Constantinople, Panama, Salonica, Smyrna, and Tangier.

I must not omit to mention the Awards Committee of the Post Office, which exists to encourage workmen and other Post Office servants to bring forward suggestions for improvements in machinery, tools, apparatus, &c., and lists of the awards are published from time to time in the Post Office Circular. The Postmaster-General, in a recent report, stated that "since the operations of the Committee began, the Post Office workmen have displayed greater interest in their work."

There is a systematic inspection of the conditions of employment under Post Office contractors. The amended Fair Wages Resolution passed by the House of Commons on the 10th March 1909 is now inserted in all contracts for Post Office stores, and firms desiring to be added to the official lists of contractors are required to give an undertaking that they will conform strictly to the conditions of this Resolution. A clause is also introduced into head-dress and clothing contracts prescribing minimum wages for women and girl workers.

The labour conditions of the Post Office in other respects are sometimes not so satisfactory. A Superintending Engineer recently sent in a claim for a double extra allowance for certain of his men who had performed seventy-six hours' extra duty each in a week, and he explained that one of the men had worked for eighteen of these hours "under somewhat discouraging conditions, being head downwards in a manhole." Many of us would prefer to take the risk of balancing ourselves on the top of a telegraph pole.

The work of the Stores Department is, it will be seen, of a singularly responsible character. Dealing as it does with contractors in a very large way, it requires

in its officers not only judgment and experience but the highest commercial probity as well. Dealing also with large numbers of workmen, it has opportunities of earning for the State a reputation for fair treatment, and for setting an example to private firms. No doubt the popular view would be that the Stores only supply telegraph poles, sealing-wax, and things of that sort, and any salesman in Oxford Street could do the work. The Stores Department suffers from its name: the man in the street connects it in his mind with the Civil Service Stores, and he knows what goes on in those premises. But if he were to visit the offices of the Department, he would find the difference rather striking, and he would for ever afterwards have a wondering respect for "the man from the Stores" who buys and sells articles by the million, and who will probably ask you for the loan of a pencil or a stick of sealing-wax, as his personal supply of these articles has run short.

CHAPTER XV

OCEAN MAILS

THE change which has taken place in the carriage of oversea mails during the last hundred years is as great as the revolution which happened in the case of the inland postal service. And in both instances, of course, it was the discovery of the steam engine which accounted for the change. In both instances, also, it meant the closing of a period during which romance and adventure were the usual accompaniments of service in the Post Office. The sailing vessel, beautiful to look at and with her capacity to carry his Majesty's mails speedily and punctually depending largely on a fair wind and freedom from capture by his Majesty's enemies, is a more inspiring subject for the writer than the crossing of the Atlantic within five days of the *Mauretania* in spite of wind and weather. Neither poetry nor art has found much inspiration in mere speed. It is only a prosaic ideal of the modern Post Office.

In a previous chapter I have stated that the Dover Road is probably the oldest mail route in the kingdom. The reason is, obvious, because it was the road by which the foreign mails travelled. The correspondence between the Court and foreign governments was of no small account in the time of the Tudors and Stuarts, and "ocean mails" in those days were probably considered of greater importance than inland posts. But all the mails except those to Ireland went eastward.

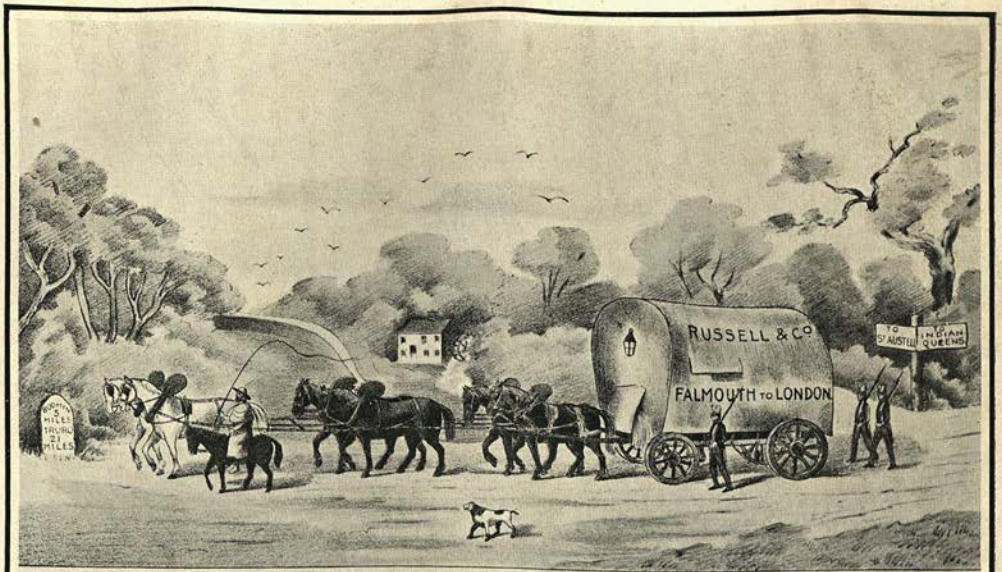
Ocean Mails

"Stepping Westward" in those days was to be an adventurer or discoverer. The Atlantic was not yet a ferry: it was the Great Unknown. Dover, Ramsgate, Harwich, and Yarmouth shared in the duty of providing packets for the mails. During every French war Dover was useless as a packet station, and the correspondence then went by Harwich or Yarmouth. It was partly owing to the necessity for obtaining a port of departure less liable to the dangers from foreign enemies that in 1688 Falmouth, an extreme westerly port, was selected for the headquarters of the Post Office Packet Service. Gradually this port became the most important station of the service, and it not only served Southern Europe but the United States and America. The story of this service has been admirably told by Mr. A. H. Norway, and it is not my purpose here to do anything more than summarise briefly the life of the old days. It is a tale of stirring adventures and sea fights. In times of war and sometimes even of peace there was constant risk of seizure, and every packet was armed to meet emergencies of this kind. The instructions to the captains of these vessels were to run while they could, to fight when they could no longer run, and to throw the mails overboard when fighting was no longer possible. Within these instructions there was abundant scope for exciting voyages. These were great days for Falmouth, and her position as a mail port gave her an advantage over the rest of the Kingdom. She knew of wars and revolutions before even London could be in possession of the facts.

The packets brought also bullion in large quantities, and on reaching Falmouth the treasure was despatched by road to London in vehicles which were known as Russell's Wagons. A walking pace of about three miles an hour was kept up throughout the long journey,

but there were many people to whom the high coach fares were prohibitive, and who were ready to travel by these wagons, sleeping by night beneath the tilt. The drivers were armed, and when treasure was on board a guard of soldiers marched with the wagons. It was a tedious but picturesque way of travelling to London, and in the old days, when the roads were bad, and exposed to attacks from highwaymen, there was perhaps very little enjoyment to be obtained out of the journey. Still these wagons continued, not to run but "to stroll," long after the introduction of railways, and Mr. Norway tells us that it is only fifty years since they "might have been met toiling at their leisurely pace along the western road."

Mr. Norway quotes from a letter written by a Spanish traveller who visited England in 1808. What he says will help us to realise how much the Packet Service meant to Falmouth. Don Manuel Alvarez Espriella was the traveller, and he had just arrived by the packet at Falmouth when he wrote the letter. This is what he says: "The perpetual stir and bustle in this inn is as surprising as it is wearisome. Doors opening and shutting, bells ringing, voices calling to the waiter from every quarter, while he cries 'Coming' to one room and hurries away to another. Everybody is in a hurry here: either they are going off in the packets and are hastening their preparations to embark, or they have just arrived and are impatient to be on the road homeward. Every now and then a carriage rattles up to the door with a rapidity which makes the very house shake. The man who cleans the boots is running in one direction, the barber with his powder-bag in another. Here goes the barber's boy with his hot water and razors: there comes the clean linen from the washerwoman, and the hall is full of porters



LEAVING THE OFFICES, KILLIGREW STREET EVERY MONDAY AT NOON. AND ARRIVING AT THE CASTLE AND FALCON INN, ALDERSGATE STREET, LONDON, ON THE FOLLOWING SATURDAY. JUNE. 1833.

How Treasure was Brought to London about the Beginning of Last Century.

Bullion in large quantities was often landed at Falmouth by the mail packets for despatch by land to London. It was placed on wagons, which journeyed the whole distance to London at a walking pace guarded by soldiers.

and sailors bringing up luggage or bearing it away. Now you hear a horn blow because the post is coming in, and in the middle of the night you are awakened by another because it is going out. Nothing is done in England without a noise, and yet noise is the only thing they forget in the bill."

This extract is extremely interesting, not only for the picture which it gives us of Falmouth a hundred years ago, but because it bears out the experience of most travellers from the Continent at the present day. The more leisurely ways of Spain in particular are as sharply contrasted at the present time with those of England as they evidently were in 1808.

There was considerable progress made in the building of sailing ships during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A ship performing the Packet Service in 1693 was described as one of "eighty-five tons and fourteen guns, with powder and shot and firearms, and all other munitions of war." The sailors were not extravagantly paid for their services, but there were many recognised and unrecognised ways of improving their income. One of the recognised ways was the permission to take prizes if such fell in their way. There are in existence curious records showing also that the sailors received donations and pensions for wounds obtained in action. With that passion for precision and organisation which has always characterised the Post Office, a financial value was attached to almost every part of the human body. "Each arm or leg amputated above the elbow or knee is £8 per annum; below the knee is 20 nobles. Loss of the sight of one eye is £4, of the pupil of the eye £5; of the sight of both eyes £12, of the pupils of both eyes £14; and according to these rules we consider also how much the hurt affects the body, and make the allowances

accordingly." And we find that Edward James had a donation of £5 because a musket shot had grazed on the tibia of his left leg, and Thomas Williams had £12 because a Granada shell had stuck fast in his left foot. Such were some of the inducements and special increments offered to men to join the Post Office Packet Service.

With the peace which followed Waterloo the fighting times of the Packet Service came to an end, and in a few years the introduction of steam navigation began a completely new order of things. The Post Office gave up her packets, Falmouth was given up as a mail station, and the era of mail contracts began; and if we measure distance by time instead of mileage, the shrinkage of the world became more marked year by year. It is interesting to trace this in the story of what is now called the Atlantic Ferry. The first vessel to cross the Atlantic by steam was the *Savannah* in 1819, but she was partly under sail, and she took thirty-five days to make the passage. The *Royal William* crossed under steam in 1831; but she took forty days over the voyage. Up to that date, therefore, steam power was scarcely a rival to the sailing vessel. Indeed there were cases in which sailing vessels had crossed the Atlantic under favourable conditions in less than fourteen days. In 1838, however, a great advance was made. First the *Sirius* and then the *Great Western* in that year made record passages, the one in eighteen and a half days, the other in thirteen and a half days. The latter vessel made passages for several years, and her average per voyage was fifteen days and a half.

Then in 1840 came the contract with the Cunard Company to carry the mails for the British Government, and the history of that company has been a continuous breaking of records and of improvement

in services. The names of the huge vessels belonging to this company which have successively lowered the Atlantic record are familiar to most of us, and they belong in a special way to the story of the Post Office. There was the *Britannia* in 1840, which began with a voyage of fourteen days, and the *China* in 1862 and the *Batavia* in 1870 reduced this record considerably. Then followed in 1881 the *Servia*, the first of the modern type of vessel; in 1884 the *Umbria* and *Etruria* with speeds of 19 knots an hour; in 1893 the *Campania* and *Lucania* with 22 knots; and in 1895 the *Lusitania* and *Mauretania* with 25 knots. The record has now been reduced to considerably under five days. The present contract is for a weekly service to the United States *via* Liverpool and New York. The British Post Office only pays its contractors for the weight of mails actually carried, and reserves the right to send specially addressed letters by foreign ships: most famous among these are the vessels of the Hamburg-American line, which have at different times held the Atlantic record.

The White Star line has also since 1877 been regularly employed by contract to carry the mails between Liverpool and New York, and the *Teutonic* and the *Majestic*, completed in 1889 and 1890, were the first merchant ships constructed with a view to their use as auxiliaries to the British navy.

The idea of the Travelling Post Office is especially suited to overseas mails, and on these liners sea post offices are established, where the mails are sorted in transit and made ready for delivery at the completion of the voyage. The sorters are at work during the whole of the voyage; as many as 250 bags are often opened, and the number in an exceptional mail has often reached 700. The sorters are required to wear uniform, and are regarded as officers subject to the

discipline of the ship, but they take their meals in the first class saloon. They have two or three days in New York before the return voyage: it is a popular branch of the service, and there is considerable eagerness to join it, in spite of the fact that the Transatlantic mails are sometimes extraordinarily heavy.

I can only deal with the chief steamship companies which contract with the British Government for the carriage of the mails. And chief among these is the Peninsular and Oriental Steamship Company, which, during almost the whole of its career, has acted as the agent of the Government in the conveyance of mails to the East. Until 1835 all our mails for India were carried round the Cape of Good Hope, and the approximate time occupied was four months. In that year a change was made, and the mail was sent *via* Egypt. The first contract with the P. & O. Company dates from 1837, and this was an arrangement for a monthly service between Falmouth and Vigo, Oporto, Lisbon, and Gibraltar. The company obtained a charter of incorporation in 1840, and one of the conditions was that steam communication with India should be established within two years. This condition was fulfilled, and the *Hindustan* was despatched to India, *via* the Cape of Good Hope, on the 26th September 1842. But the advantages of the route across the Isthmus of Suez, even before the opening of the Canal, were sufficiently obvious to the directors of the company, and they practically organised what came to be known as the Overland Route. But the man who first established a service along this route was an officer of the East India Company named Lieutenant Waghorn. He deserves honourable mention in any account of the service to India. He believed in this route, and worked hard to make it practicable in face of innumerable obstacles. He was

a man of indomitable energy and of extraordinary stature. There is a story told of his visit to a country fair with a friend. He endeavoured to enter one of the shows and was refused admission twice. The friend sought an interview with the proprietor. The only reply was, "I pray you, sir, take that gentleman away. The fact is he is two inches taller than my giant."

Waghorn lived long enough to see the Peninsular and Oriental Company establish a regular service across the isthmus. This meant an uncomfortable passage by canal boat and steamer to Cairo, then by a two-wheeled omnibus for ninety miles across the desert of Suez. For many years camels carried the mails from Cairo to Suez, where the P. & O. steamers again resumed charge. The first mail service to Australia *via* the Isthmus of Suez was opened in 1852. In 1859 a railway was made across the isthmus, and this considerably simplified the journey. Then in 1869 the Suez Canal was opened, but owing to difficulties raised by the British Government it was not until many years after that the mails were permitted to pass through the Canal. Since 1888 the direct sea mail service between England and India, China, and the Australian colonies has been continuous.

The mails leaving London on Friday nights are despatched from Brindisi in specially designed twin screw vessels, which arrive at Port Said about ninety-six hours after the mails have been despatched from London. On this service the *Osiris* and *Iris* are employed, and there is the curious fact concerning them that they are the only vessels in the mercantile marine which cross the sea with mails and passengers only. At Port Said the mails are transferred to the big liner which has come from London *via* the Straits of Gibraltar. The service is weekly to Bombay, to Shanghai and

Australia fortnightly, but since 1888 a contract with the Orient Company for a fortnightly service to Australia has given that colony a weekly mail.

The Union Castle Line to Madeira and the Cape provides the mail service to South Africa, and ships like the *Edinburgh Castle* and the *Balmoral Castle*, which sail from Southampton, make very swift passages.

But the catalogue is a long one of oversea contracts, and besides there is little variety in the nature of the service. There is an interesting table in the Post Office Guide showing the approximate time taken in the transmission of correspondence from London to certain places abroad. According to this list the longest journey for a letter now figures as 44 days, and that is to the Fiji Islands *via* Suez, but if you send it by Vancouver the journey is reduced to 30 days. The longest journey without an alternative route is to Hobart, 34 days, but Brisbane and Manila run it very close, 33 and 32 days respectively. Bombay is under 15 days and Cape Town is 17 days. We are practically within a month's touch on paper of the whole civilised world. We have travelled far since the 25th of December 1815, when Charles Lamb wrote to his friend Thomas Manning, who was in China: "Dear old friend and absentee, this is Christmas Day, 1815, with us: what it may be with you I don't know—the 12th of June next year, perhaps." Lamb's idea was that in writing to a friend it was the day of the receipt of the letter that was the thing to be concerned about, and how difficult it was to be with your friend in imagination six months hence. When your friend was reading your words, "all your opinions will be out of date, your jokes obsolete, your puns rejected with fastidiousness as wit of the last age." But thirty days is a different matter, and even our friends in New Zealand or the Fiji Islands seem only

in the next street compared with similar conditions a hundred years ago.

At home we grumble at the Post Office, and are irritated at the delay of a single post, but if we are living abroad, or have friends and relations in distant countries, the very word "mail" has a sweet sound in our ear. If we spoke in rhythm, as people sometimes do when labouring under strong emotion, we should say of the Post Office in a foreign land or when parted from our friends, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings." "The feet" may be a twin screw steamship, but the sight is none the less beautiful.

But besides the big foreign services there are a very large number of contracts for conveying mails in British waters. Indeed, to examine the list is to understand in the fullest meaning the term British Isles. When we use the term we think of Great Britain and Ireland, and we perhaps concede the Isle of Man and the Isle of Wight to the group. But there are also the Scilly Islands, the Channel Islands, the Western Isles of Scotland including Skye and the Hebrides, the Arran Islands in Ireland, and the Orkney and Shetland Islands off the coast of Scotland.

Chief in the Home Packet Service is perhaps the mail service between Holyhead and Kingstown. In the old days Milford and Holyhead were both stations for the Irish mails, but Holyhead has always held the premier position, and now Fishguard has supplanted Milford. Here is a copy of an old advertisement published in 1810 in a Dublin newspaper. It will show how the service was performed in the days before steam navigation :—

"Notice is hereby given that the Postmasters-General are willing to receive Proposals for a Contract, for a

period not exceeding seven years, for Two Stout Wherries of from forty-five to fifty tons burden for the performance of His Majesty's Express Services between Dublin and Holyhead." This is one of the stormiest and most uncertain of channel passages, and the express services occupied anything from seven to twenty hours or longer in making the voyage. The *Ulster*, *Munster*, *Leinster*, and *Connaught*, the fine vessels of the City of Dublin Steamship Company, have a speed of 23 knots an hour, and keep excellent time. The Isle of Man Steam Packet Company's vessel, *Ben-my-Chree*, averages 24 knots at sea. There are fine services between Southampton and Weymouth and the Channel Islands, and services slow but sure to the western islands of Scotland and the distant Shetlands.

There is one British island at least which has no regular mail service, but occasionally improvises a curious service of its own. St. Kilda is a remote island lying off the west coast of Scotland about 50 miles from the nearest land. The scenery is wild and rugged, sheer cliffs rising from the sea in some parts to a height of 1250 feet, and covered by myriads of sea birds. There are about sixteen cottages on the island and eighty inhabitants. Two or three times a year during the summer a tourist steamer calls there, but the island is cut off from the mainland from August to May except for the occasional visit of an Aberdeen trawler. The islanders, left to their own resources, endeavour to open up communication with the mainland in this manner. They construct a sheepskin buoy, and the letters are enclosed in a tin canister with sufficient money to pay postage, and a wooden label is attached bearing the inscription: "St. Kilda mail. Please open." The mail can only be launched with a hope of success in a gale of north-west wind, which

drives it across to the island of Lewis, a distance of 60 miles. In a gale of this kind in 1905, the mail arrived on the shores of Lewis within two days. In the mail boat was found money to defray the cost of the postage. The dealer who sells in Glasgow and London the tweed woven by the St. Kilda islanders received half-a-dozen letters. They were salt with the lime of the sea, and in places scarcely legible. One of the islanders wrote: "Very few of the trawlers



have visited us this year owing to the bad weather. I wish we could hear how you are all getting on on the mainland, and especially how the Churches are progressing." The St. Kilda folk are keen theologians, and the struggle between the "United" and the "Wee Free" Churches interested them keenly. They were "Wee Frees" almost to a man.

The mail boat does not always reach its destination. Three were sent off on the same date, and two were never heard of again. The third was picked up at Dunrossness, in Shetland, after having drifted for

two months and a day. But the letters, though sadly damaged by the sea, were duly posted at Lerwick.

There is, of course, great excitement in St. Kilda when a tourist steamer arrives. The resources of the little post office, which is only a bare room with a table and desk, are severely strained. The inward mail is never a heavy one, but the outgoing one on these occasions is quite imposing. All the tourists bring on shore postcards and letters to obtain the coveted St. Kilda postmark. The postmaster has a busy time, and the post office is open for quite an hour, an unusual event in the island.

There are still narrow seas in the British Isles where the sailing vessel holds the mail contract, just as there are still inland districts where the mail coach survives. Between the mainland of Shetland and Fair Isle, the mails are carried once a fortnight by sailing vessel, and there are similar services between Shetland and Foula, and between Mallaig and Knoydart on the west coast of Scotland.

I have said nothing as yet about the oldest ocean mail route in the Kingdom, the narrow channel between Dover and Calais. By far the largest amount of foreign correspondence still goes this way. India, Australasia, China, and Japan mails as well as European cross the Straits of Dover, and as a mail station Dover is second to none. Mails go also by British contract *via* Harwich and the Hook of Holland, and Newhaven and Dieppe, but the quantity is comparatively small. There is also a Belgian Government service between Dover and Ostend, and a Dutch Company's mail service between Queenborough, Folkestone, and Flushing.

The Admiralty Pier at Dover has been facetiously called "the pier of the realm," but there is a truth underlying the play on the word. The connection

between the Post Office and the Admiralty has always been very close since the days of the Packet Service, but until recent years the Admiralty was not much in evidence at Dover, and the description of the pier would have been more fittingly "the Post Office Pier." The Admiralty has now, however, with the completed harbour works, entered into possession; but the Post Office is still a working partner.

CHAPTER XVI

THE POSTAL UNION

In spite of desolating wars and quarrels between rival nations, there has been growing in Europe during the last fifty or sixty years a sense of the need for international action. The Great Exhibition of 1851 raised hopes of universal brotherhood and of the turning of spears into pruning-hooks, but in a few short years the nations were again engaged in the fiercest conflicts, and at the present time European countries are armed in a way that is a constant danger to peace. Still the fact remains that during the whole time international movements have been developing, and a spirit of unity is spreading among the nations. Governments are usually the last bodies of men to feel such influences. The movements come from below—from the workers, who realise that the problems they have to face are the same as those of every other country, and from the men of business, who have long since realised that co-operation with the foreigner is better for trade than any attempts to hamper his action. The doctrines of universal brotherhood and of love have no doubt exercised a certain influence on European thought: the message of the poets and of religious enthusiasts has usually taken this form; but the verdict of the men who pride themselves on their common sense has in the past been, that the ideas do not belong to practical politics. The discovery of modern times is that the message of the poets is good business.

The Postal Union

Solidarity among the nations is the discovery of the commercial man, and although the sentiment of nationality and the instinct for war are too deeply engrained in the human mind to be uprooted at once, the fact remains that the avoidance of war at all hazards is now the avowed object of European peoples, just as in former times the rushing into war seemed the easiest and most profitable way of settling difficulties.

Then the long peace which followed on Waterloo, and the introduction of the railways, opened up the Continent to the traveller, and year by year the communications, friendly and commercial, between the nations increased. And nothing irritated both the traveller and the business man more than the capricious varieties in postal rates which existed in Europe prior to 1875. There were in existence treaties, agreements, and understandings between different nations on the subject of postal communications, but every national Post Office made the best terms it could for itself when making a treaty, and there was no approach to uniformity. The idea of each nation was to make the foreigner pay, and while in many instances this policy may have meant an immediate increase of revenue to the particular Government, it did not help the trade of the country, which suffered also from the natural efforts of the rival country to pursue a policy of retaliation in postal matters. There were many units of weight in use; and the scale of progression was variable, as were also the charges. The latter were very high, and their calculation was a matter of great difficulty. A letter which had to be sent in transit through several countries was charged according to the different units and progressions of weight in vogue. Thus the postage on such a letter was ordinarily composed of the internal rate of the country of origin, the internal rate of that

of destination, the rate of each country it passed through, and the charge for sea transit where such means was employed. With the ideas then prevalent, it seemed to be not only good business but the fair and square thing all round, that every nation should exact its full charge on every letter which passed through its boundaries.

The honour of first raising the question of the organisation of international postal business belongs to the United States Government, which in 1862 suggested a conference of the delegates of different Postal Administrations for the purpose of discussing the matter. Fifteen Governments at once adopted the proposal, and the Conference took place at Paris in May 1863. The Conference lasted nearly a month, and discussed thirty-six questions which arose in connection with the three fundamental questions of the uniformity of weight, the uniformity of rates and the simplification of accounting, including naturally an amelioration of the system of transit. From a postal point of view the delegates represented nine-tenths of the commerce and nineteen-twentieths of the correspondence of the whole world. They represented, moreover, 400 millions of persons belonging to the most civilised and the most industrious nations of the world. The outcome of the labours of the Conference was the proposition for an International Postal Union. This idea was set forth in 1868 in the official journal of the Postal Administration of Northern Germany, by Herr Von Stephan, who deserves a place of honourable mention among postal reformers. He suggested a Universal Congress to consider the matter, but the Franco-Prussian War interrupted the negotiations. They were reopened when peace was established, and the first move came then from the little republic of Switzerland, which from its

neutral position was better able to take the lead at a time when national animosities were strong in Europe. The Government of the Swiss Confederation invited representatives from Europe, the United States, and Egypt to meet at Berne in 1874, and it was here that the Postal Union was called into existence. The man of the hour was Herr Von Stephan, who came fresh from carrying out a similar scheme among the numerous small German States. Dr. Von Stephan was a man of ideas who also possessed eloquence, and he was the leading spirit of the Congress.

The central idea of the Union which he proposed was to arrange that the whole of the countries forming it should be for postal purposes a single territory, and within that territory there was to be a uniform tariff. It was necessary that such a scheme should be large enough to make it possible for the greatest available number of administrations to adhere to it, and that the sacrifices that it would be needful to make would be more than compensated for by the development of postal traffic. Of course the idea met with great opposition. Financial experts shook their heads, and authoritatively declared that proposals for reducing and simplifying postal rates were a danger to the finances of their respective countries. In Great Britain, where the Post Office brings in annually a great revenue to the Treasury, there was also opposition: it was clear that under the new arrangement the British Government would have to do a great deal for nothing in the carrying of the world's letters. Nationalists of all countries saw in the proposal a menace to national sentiment and national glory. But over and above all these considerations was the great question of the public convenience, and people were beginning to understand the great principle of State administration,

that a loss to one Department is not a loss to the State if the people benefit. Dr. Von Stephan was for twenty-five years the head of the German Postal Administration, and he attended more than one of the Congresses subsequent to that at Berne. At the Vienna Congress of 1891 he modestly resisted the idea that the Postal Union originated from his action. He said: "Ideas are not originated by any individual. They float in the atmosphere for a whole epoch, at first vaguely, then in a more distinct form, until they condense and precipitate themselves in taking body and life. The idea of unification is in harmony with the aspirations of our century: it prevails to-day in many of the domains of human activity: it constitutes the true motive power of human civilisation. As for our great machine of international exchange, it was, moreover, stimulated by this irrefutable fact, that the enormous masses which devolved upon it to handle, which increased from day to day, and extended from frontier to frontier, and to the furthest seas and latitudes, urgently demanded a simplification of the entire mechanism as the only means of making headway against its almost unlimited requirements and of maintaining indispensable rapidity and regularity. Such are the natural elements which were the true founders of the Universal Postal Union."

The Treaty of Berne has been described as the greatest manifestation of the spirit of solidarity in the history of the world, and the Conference of Berne has been spoken of as the first Parliament of Mankind. It is always a temptation to speak in exaggerated terms of great advances in humanity and civilisation. International Conferences had been held before in the history of mankind, notably those of the Catholic Church, but their tendency had been rather to

stultify human thought, and they had done little or nothing to promote the peace of the world. But here at Berne had been called into existence a Postal Parliament, and in the different Congresses which have been held since at various capitals, debates and discussions have taken place between delegates from all the nations participating in the Union. The work these Congresses do is quietly and unostentatiously performed, but it is a real portion of that great movement in favour of peace and goodwill among nations which, in spite of great armies and huge navies, is leavening the life of Europe at the present day.

Ten years after the Treaty of Berne the Union had absorbed nearly all the nations of the world, and to-day China is the only civilised country which does not participate, although she is constantly expressing her hope to be able to do so at no distant date.

The first and principal work of the Union was to abolish the involved and differing rates of postage on correspondence between various nations. Letters, postcards, and printed matter were in future to circulate at one common series of rates, viz. 2½d., 1d., and ½d., or their equivalents in the currencies of the different countries. As the Union grew, the sphere of its activities also increased, and to the original scheme were added arrangements for the exchange of insured articles, money orders, and parcels.

The business of the Postal Union is conducted at a Central Office at Berne. Here are settled misunderstandings and disputes, and the accounts for the conveying of mails and the exchange of money orders, &c. The expenses of this bureau are remarkably small, and are met by the Post Offices of the participating nations. A publication called *L'Union Postale* is issued monthly by the Central Office.

The Postal Union

One of the latest schemes adopted by the Union is the reply coupon. People of a generous disposition are able to pay not only the postage on their own letters but also that of the replies. Whatever opinion may be formed of the anxiety of men and women in general to save other people's pockets at the expense of their own, there can be no doubt that a limited number, either from altruistic motives or because possibly they wish to exploit some commercial scheme, demand some means of prepaying replies other than the double postcard, which has never been much in favour. Special coupons are now exchangeable by the Post Office of any country which adopts the scheme for a postage stamp of 25 centimes (2½d.) or its equivalent. For instance, a friend can write to you from Japan and enclose a coupon which, if you present it at a post office, will obtain for you without charge the stamp necessary for your reply.

Since the Congress at Berne there have been held Congresses at Berne in 1876, Paris in 1880, Lisbon in 1885, Vienna in 1891, Washington in 1897 and Rome in 1904. What does a Congress of this kind resemble when it is sitting? Is it simply a dull assembly of black-coated gentlemen such as our own House of Commons? Here is a lively account of the first meeting of the Washington Congress, taken from the *Washington Evening Star* of the 5th May 1897: "The Universal Postal Congress begun its sessions at the old Corcoran Art Gallery this morning shortly after eleven o'clock. The delegates began to gather long before this hour, and assembled in the room to the left of the entrance on the first floor. They made a striking and picturesque group. The majority of the gentlemen were in full dress with white gloves, but a number of them wore military uniforms with side arms.



THE POSTAL UNION MONUMENT.

Erected at Berne to commemorate the founding of the Postal Union. On the ledge of a rock is seated a woman, whose hand rests on the escutcheon of the town of Berne. On the summit of the rock a bank of clouds, which seems to glide into space, bears up a sphere around which float five female figures, symbols of the five divisions of the world, offering letters to each other.

The profusion of decorations worn by the delegates was as notable as the insignias were brilliant and beautiful. Jewelled stars, gem-encrusted circlets, and a large variety of other emblems significant of the honours conferred upon their wearers by potentates and governments, were displayed. Some of the delegates wore as many as a dozen decorations of this character hanging pendent from brilliant ribbons around their necks, pinned to coat lapels or bosoms, or held by broad, bright scarfs that encircled their bodies. The Danish and Italian representatives were attired in military uniforms heavily embroidered with gold, and the Russians wore velvet cloaks with many silver buttons, while golden spurs hung at the heels of their patent-leather riding-boots. The Japanese wore the military uniform of that empire. . . . The conversation among the delegates buzzed in a dozen different languages, the little groups of delegates from the same country talking together in their native tongues but quickly using French when addressing their remarks to others."

Perhaps I may add an extract from a speech made at the conclusion of the same Conference by Sir Spencer Walpole, who was at that time Secretary of the British Post Office: "One word more, gentlemen. We are going back to our duties and our toils: but we shall never forget our meetings in this beautiful city of Washington, where we have worked to improve the postal communications of the world. At this moment I recall the morning on which we found ourselves collected in a little church of this city. The representatives of sixty nations and I know not how many religions were met together to show respect to a colleague unfortunately deceased, and to commend his soul to the God of all nations of the world—both eastern and western. That gathering seems to me

a type of our Congress. We, the delegates of sixty nations, found ourselves united in the same thought—I had almost said in the same religion. I hope that this thought will more and more dominate our work, and that the improvement of the communications of the world at which we have laboured will lead to friendship among the nations, to brotherliness among men, and to universal peace."

Only those who have been present at one of these Congresses can fully realise how much they make for the results hoped for by Sir Spencer Walpole. It is a revelation of the community of interest which is shared by all the nations of the world in the matter of international intercourse. And of course the effect on other departments of life is wide-reaching.

In order to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the foundation of the Universal Postal Union a monument was unveiled at Berne in October 1910. The sculptor is M. René de Saint Marceaux of Paris. On a ledge of a rock whose broad base is solidly embedded in the earth, and from the foot of which flows a small spring, is seated a woman whose delicate hand rests on the escutcheon of the town of Berne. On the summit of the rock a bank of clouds, which seems to glide in space, bears up a sphere round which float five female figures, symbols of the five continents of the world. The figures are passing a letter from hand to hand, illustrating the activity of the universal post. Always moving, regardless of obstruction or frontiers, it carries to the utmost limits of the world the messages of joy or mourning which are entrusted to its care. The monument is an additional ornament to the beautiful city of Berne: it is also an abiding memory of the success of the greatest of modern efforts to bring under one banner all the nations of the earth.

CHAPTER XVII

CONCERNING FOREIGN POST OFFICES

THE whole tendency of the postal system in Europe and America is towards uniformity. The Postal Union is largely responsible for this, while the necessities of trade and foreign travel have brought about a simplification of methods and rates everywhere. Still, wherever there are differences of race and nationality even identical systems will be worked differently, and anybody who has travelled in Europe and America is forced at every turn to compare, favourably or unfavourably as the case may be, the foreign Post Office with the one which he is accustomed to at home. Perhaps the chief differences that an Englishman notes in several European countries are the more leisurely ways of the official: this individual does not understand the necessity for speeding up, and he looks upon the man who is in a hurry as simply a mad Englishman. The leading features of our own postal system are to be found in most countries: the postal service, the telegraph, and the telephone are usually linked together, and the difference is the human factor. The experiences of all travellers differ for this very reason. Some return home with really heartrending accounts of their experiences with the foreign Post Offices, with tales of red tape and "the insolence of office" which are not to be matched with the complaints of our people against their own Post Office. Many of these complaints of travellers arise obviously

out of difficulties with the language, and the absurd irritation of the average Britisher at ways and methods of doing things which do not correspond with his idea of good business. Other travellers return with glowing accounts of the superiority of foreign methods, of the courtesy which has been shown to them by officials, and of the many conveniences they have found abroad to which this country is still a stranger. Many of us, for instance, have revelled in the privileges offered to the tourist in Switzerland. There is scarcely anything you cannot send by post in Switzerland, from a piece of card to a well-filled travelling trunk or a sack of potatoes. But then we must remember that the chief industry of Switzerland is tourists, and she certainly caters for these in a most exemplary manner. There is, perhaps, more rigidity in applying postal regulations on the Continent than in this country. Especially is this the case in Germany, where the whole nation understands discipline. What we sneer at as red tape the German regards as a necessary part of the organisation of his empire.

But, broadly speaking, the Continental Post Office is closely allied to our own in its methods, and where it differs is in its adaptation to local habits and peculiarities.

There is a type of English traveller who habitually regards the foreigner as a person incapable of the higher civilisation to be found in the British Isles. We can have no sympathy with him, and the British Post Office has learnt much and is learning much from the Post Offices of other countries. The German Post Office is, for instance, one of the best-organised systems in the world. The German people owe this state of things largely to the ability and energy of Dr. Von Stephan, who was mainly instrumental in estab-

lishing the Postal Union. The post offices of the German Empire are among the finest modern buildings in Europe. Many were built under the direction of Dr. Von Stephan, and they are an example to the British Post Office of how such buildings should be erected. It was a fixed principle with Dr. Von Stephan, that when any special type of architecture distinguished any particular town the architecture of the post office should faithfully reflect it. As a consequence the offices which have been erected since 1870 reveal great diversities of style, and are in striking contrast to the monotony characteristic of our English post offices. We may be quite sure that the German Postmaster-General would never have sanctioned the erection in a quaint old English town, full of Tudor and Jacobean architecture, of a "standard post office." Yet this enormity is constantly being perpetrated in some of our old English towns and villages, and the consequence is that the beauty and picturesqueness of the place are seriously damaged. The post office swears at the rest of the buildings, and if the buildings had only a voice I am quite sure they would swear at the post office.

Then Germany was for years in advance of Great Britain in the provision of underground cables for telegraphic purposes. Before even a start in this direction had been made by the British Post Office over 220 cities and towns of the German Empire had secured telegraphic communications in spite of storms, and above all in spite of the accidents of war.

But against all this we have the accusation that the German official is rude and overbearing. He gives the impression that you, being only a civilian, should wait on his convenience: it is your recognition of the dignity of his office. A writer in *The Sketch* some time

ago described the outcome of his temerity in venturing to enter a post office in Germany to purchase a postage stamp. The first thing which struck him was the arrangement of little slits in the glass walls, behind which the postal officials sat. He took up his place at the end of a queue of people, but after waiting some time without being able to report progress, took steps to find out the cause and found that the slit had not been opened. The official on duty appeared unperturbed, and was not doing anything in particular.

"Finally, with a gravity unsurpassed, I should venture to think, in history, an official undid the slit. Then a few stamps and cards were sold to members of the queue. Then the official's attention was distracted.

"'Would it be possible—?' a lady with bowed neck humbly began.

"'No.'

"The hope of the post office shut down the slit with a snap; and the queue settled down to more patience and more beating time."

The German accepts this as a part of his divinely organised scheme of things; it is the Englishman who meditates murder.

Many of us are familiar with the French Post Office. In many ways the French have been in advance of our own methods. It is only since 1897 that we have had in this country a complete system of rural posts, but as early as 1830 a law was passed in France, that in every village where there was no post office, there should at least be a delivery of letters every two days. In 1877 the Chief of the French Post Office could say with justice that the rural delivery in France was the most perfect in the world. The real hero of the French Postal Service, it has been said, is the rural postman. From year's end to year's end he trudges

on, without a rest even on the greatest holidays. In France nothing less than a revolution stops the postman's rounds, and even then he has often been seen, bag in hand, smiling on the summits of barricades with the bullets whistling around him.

The most stirring times in the history of the French Post Office were during the war of 1870–71. The efforts to maintain the postal system led to acts of great heroism on the part of the officials. The first expedient was to organise a pigeon service carrying microscopic despatches, prepared by the aid of photographic appliances. On their arrival in Paris these were flattened out and thrown by means of the electric lantern on to a screen, copied by clerks, and despatched to their destination. The number of postal pigeons employed was 313. The second expedient was to establish a regular system of postal balloons, fifty-one being employed for letter service and six for telegraphic service. These were very successful, in spite of the building by Krupp of twenty guns, supplied with telescopic apparatus, for the destruction of the balloons. The bravery of the French balloon postmen was only equalled by that of many of the ordinary letter carriers, who conveyed letters through the catacombs and quarries of Paris and its suburbs, and, under various disguises, often through the midst of the Prussian army. Several lost their lives in the discharge of their duties. The eagerness of the Germans to defeat the schemes of the brave Frenchmen is illustrated by the fact that they employed hawks to catch the postal pigeons.

France has lagged behind Great Britain in other directions. The French Postal Savings Banks only date from 1881, although from 1875, the post offices had been used as agencies for existing banks. But we must remember that the French Government has for years

offered special facilities to the small investor in "Rentes," the equivalent of Consols in this country, and the special need of a State Savings Bank was not so marked as in this country. The French Postal Telegraph system was established nearly ten years after the British system, but on the other hand there have been postal telephones in France since 1879.

The Parcel Post is managed differently in France from this country. The service is carried on under the control of the Post Office by railway and steamship companies. Parcels are not accepted at post offices except in places distant from railway stations, and in Paris and important towns they are taken in at special parcel booking offices. Neither are parcels delivered by the Post Office but by the railway companies.

Then in France there is a postal service called "Valeurs à recouvrer." Everybody is allowed to deposit bills at a post office for collection. This is a great convenience and very practical. You enclose the bill, or the invoice or draft which you want to be paid, in a special envelope called "Enveloppe de valuer à recouvrer," and you hand it to an officer of the Post Office. A certificate of the posting must be obtained. When the bill or invoice has been paid by the addressee, the Department sends you a money order which can be cashed at any post office.

The French Post Office also supplies card money orders payable not at a post office, but at the payee's address.

The Spanish Post Office is trying. Spain is a thinly populated country, with comparatively few large towns, and if you travel off the beaten track you will meet all kinds of inconveniences. A Spanish post office is usually superior to so petty a trade as the sale of stamps: you obtain these at the shops. Moreover, though

other postal business is transacted at the Post Office, there are certain hours set apart for different kinds of business. A Spanish post office may be open from nine until ten for the registration of letters, from ten until eleven for the sale of postal orders, from eleven until noon for the payment of postal orders, and so on. This is the Spaniard's idea of simplifying business, not only for the public, but the official. The Spanish postal official is often a poorly paid and rather badly used individual. The postmaster of a large town in the Canary Islands confessed to a friend of mine, who was postmaster of a big city in the United Kingdom, that his salary was less than a third of the Englishman's. And he added, "I don't even get that as a rule unless I go to Madrid for it."

A visitor to Grand Canary on asking for a postcard was informed that there had been none in the island for three months. The postmaster had applied to Madrid for a supply but in vain. He was probably expected to fetch his stores as well as his salary. The Spaniard, at any rate, is modest about his Post Office: he does not increase your annoyance by claiming perfection. He is one of the oldest members of the Old World, and he has not learnt the art of self-advertisement.

But cross the Atlantic, visit the United States, and before you have time to experience any of the inconveniences of the postal service, you will be told it is the smartest in the world. It is not only the man in the street who makes this claim; the Postmaster-General does it frequently in his Annual Report. Here is the conclusion of one Annual Report: it is the Postmaster-General's peroration: "It is therefore not too much to state that in most of the more important relations of the Postal Service, as shown by

the statistics, the United States leads the world." It is not too much to say of this outburst that if the British Postmaster-General were to say this of his Post Office in his Annual Report, a reduction in his salary would be at once moved in the House of Commons, and it would probably be carried by the combined votes of Imperialists and Little Englanders. Owing partly to the language used by postal reformers there is an idea prevalent in parliamentary circles that the British Post Office is behind the times.

I am not denying that the United States Post Office is splendidly organised, nor that in many respects it is in advance of our own system and that of other countries, but we like to discover the advantages ourselves. If, however, the service is excellent, it certainly does not pay: the United States Post Office is carried on at a loss. And this is due, as their own officials admit, to the low rates, and the way the low rates are taken advantage of unfairly by smart Americans. The "mail matter," as it is called, is classified, and there are different rates for each class. First class, letters and post cards; second class, periodical publications; third class, miscellaneous printed matter; and fourth class, matter not included in other classes. It is the lowness of the charges for the second-class matter which is the despair of the Post Office economist in America, and to this he attributes largely the loss on the business. There is, for instance, a monthly publication in a large eastern city which weighs 4 lbs. It is delivered by the Post Office for two cents in the city in which it is mailed: it is carried free of charge to any post office within the county in which it is published, and is sent to such remote places as San Francisco, Cuba or Hawaii, at the rate of four cents a copy. For what is virtually a volume, this is an absurdly low charge for carriage,

and in comparing rates of postage with those in the United Kingdom, it must not be forgotten that letters are conveyed in America over much greater distances than in this country.

There is a growing demand in this country for a cheaper rate for periodical publications, and those who make the demand are justified in claiming that the Post Office exists for the convenience of the public, and that a reform which would be the means of increasing the circulation of useful and entertaining publications should receive the support of the State. But they are not justified in pointing to the example of America, unless they are prepared to admit that the increased charge will ultimately fall on the taxpayer of this country. The question is, "Are we justified in charging the taxpayer for a reform which will only benefit a comparatively small number of the public?" If they can convince the public through the representatives of the people in the House of Commons, the reform will be carried; but it is difficult to see how, if it is, the postal revenue of something over three millions, which at present goes to the relief of taxation, will be maintained.

In one respect the American officials are vastly ahead of us. They too have apparently suffered much from the applicants for information who are ignorant of the very elements of postal business. It has therefore occurred to the officials that systematic instruction might be given to the public on postal subjects. Here is the official order to postmasters: "Postmasters are hereby directed to confer with their local school authorities with the view of adopting the most effective method of instructing school-children as to the organisation and operations of the postal service. These instructions should cover such features of the

service as the delivery of the mails, the classification of mail matter, the registry and money order systems, and particularly the proper addressing of letters and the importance of placing return cards or envelopes. Postmasters should arrange if possible to deliver personal talks to the pupils on these subjects, and should give teachers access to the Postal Guide and Postal Laws and Regulations, and render them every assistance in securing necessary information."

Instead of being treated as a joke, as a similar order might have been in this country, numerous letters were at once received by the United States Post Office from postmasters and school-boards all over the country indicating the liveliest interest in the subject.

This is a chance for a British Postmaster-General to save his successors much unnecessary and trying correspondence, by adopting a similar policy.

The rural delivery of letters in the United States was during many recent years in a very backward state, but considerable advances have lately taken place. The fetching of letters from the post office was the practice in places with even a large population.

A writer in the *Paris Messenger* not long ago was very indignant at the claims made by an official of the American Government, "that the American postal system was the best in the world and the best managed." The writer said he had made an examination of European postal systems recently, and this was about as impudent a pronouncement as can well be imagined. America possesses no Postal Savings Bank, no Postal Telegraph system (in many Western States it costs three francs to send a dozen words a hundred miles over the monopolist private wires), there is no system of Parcel Post such as exists in England, and until recently there was no rural delivery. To see a long line of citizens,

even in towns of five and six thousand inhabitants, waiting outside the post office for their morning mail, was as curious a sight for a European as could be imagined. I should add that the writer was an American.

The report of the United States Postmaster-General is frequently a more plain-spoken and colloquial document than the purely business statement which the British Postmaster-General issues annually. This is only to be expected. Other officials in the United States have the same breezy style.

A complaint was made to the Postmaster-General by a sheriff in Texas on the conduct of a postmistress. He accused her of incivility. "We don't set up any claim that our manners are all that they should be, but we'd like to be reasoned with and helped along. The postmistress here is a worthy woman all right, and there ain't a thing against her character, but she certainly is rude and hasty. One day last week the mayor, being some flushed up and careless, refused to remove his hat and bow on asking for the official mail, whereupon his hat was shot off and plumb ruined, and he left the post office so swiftly and undignified that it told against the standing of the town. There's another thing we don't think is fair. The postmistress won't let niggers and greasers come in the office under any consideration. We ain't over fond of niggers and greasers ourselves; but it is sure discommoding for the leading citizens to have to go to the post office personally to get the mail just because this lady don't like to see anything but a gentleman. We don't like to appear fault-finding and picayunish where a lady is concerned, but this I'm telling about is sure arbitrary and abrupt, and we'd like to have her tamed down some."

The Post Office Bulletin of Chicago, a publication similar in object to our own Post Office Circular, often contains

very plain-spoken words. Unlike the authorities in England, the Chicago postmaster is quick to record, in his periodical reports of the work of his office, any humorous incidents which have come under his notice. The following lightens up a page devoted to departmental changes, hours of delivery, and new telephone services :—

"Twenty times a day some one calls at a post office or a station and requests the address of some dear friend, father, mother, daughter, wife, or delinquent debtor. The delinquent debtor is in the majority, and he usually covers his tracks successfully. To the Post Office, therefore, the creditor comes as a last resort, and he is often amazed when he is informed that addresses cannot be given; that the Post Office is not a court; is bound to respect the confidences imposed on it; that its sole business is to deliver mail; and that anyway it really has no time to ferret out addresses.

"On Monday a gentleman searching for a delinquent, hit upon the plan of sending out a special letter from the Twenty-second Street station addressed to the debtor. The debtor's residence had formerly been in this district, and the creditor was anxious to find out if he was still in the neighbourhood. So he began with a special letter. An hour after mailing he called at the station and inquired if the letter had been delivered. He was told that it had. Then he was aware it must have been delivered from this station, or the question could not have been answered off-hand. As a Sherlock Holmes he had made a great beginning. His next step was to write and address another special letter and announce his intention of following the special messenger and his wheel in a cab. The clerk in charge preserved a wooden countenance, and said that he could not prevent him following the messenger. In five minutes after the mailing of the letter two special messengers issued from—

the station. Each had letters to deliver. The man in the cab followed one of them. He followed the wrong one."

If our Post Office Circular contained racy reports of this nature concerning the smart deeds of our officials, the vested interests of the halfpenny press would be imperilled, and an injunction would be demanded against the Postmaster-General to prevent him entering into competition with private enterprise.

The Postmaster-General in one report gravely stated that the postmaster of Sheridan, Wyoming, "had been removed from his office because he had an unfortunate habit of burning all mail matter which did not meet with his approval." This action of the Postmaster-General seems certainly to have been justified: the Post Office has eccentric servants all over the world, but it draws the line at the destruction of mail matter. Wherever this happens the man is dismissed, and in England, at least, he would be prosecuted.

The South American post offices in many instances take after the mother country of Spain. The *Monte Video Times* in July 1896 made this pathetic complaint: "It is now some two years that we have been without postcards."

The Japan Post Office is, as may be imagined, splendidly organised. Before the year 1854 the state of Japan resembled that of Europe in the twelfth century. A few nobles ruled the country with despotic authority, and their united policy was to exclude the foreigner. Then the United States fleet appeared off the coast and forced upon the nobles a treaty which brought their country into the family of nations. The gates were opened; and the advance has been one of the most extraordinary happenings in modern history. In 1872 Japan established her first Post Office, and in 1877 she joined the Postal Union. She is always eager to adopt the newest ways of transacting business, and

for her Savings Bank work she has given up ledgers and has adopted the card system for keeping accounts. Her Postal Savings Bank is a wonderful success. Upwards of 8,000,000 accounts have been opened out of a population of about 47,000,000. Japan's telegraph system is equal to any in Europe. It may, perhaps, be interesting to state how Japan is related telegraphically to foreign countries. Of her messages about 40 per cent. are credited to Korea, 28 per cent. to China, 9 per cent. to England, 7 per cent. to the United States, 4 per cent. to India, 3 per cent. to Germany, 2 per cent. to France and Russia. Japan has peculiar difficulties to contend with in Post Office work owing to the great number of islands included in the Empire, the exceptionally mountainous nature of the country, and the wide areas covered by the cities in proportion to the number of their inhabitants. Of course the astonishing nature of the advance of Japan is that it has all taken place in recent years. The first effort at telegraphy was only made as recently as 1870. As in most countries, the sudden introduction of so mysterious an agency created great opposition on the part of the superstitious lower orders, and there were many attempts to cut the wires.

China has an interesting Post Office system. She has not yet joined the Postal Union, and has only partially assimilated Western ways of doing business. The service has been spoken of as "reasonably efficient." The Post Office serves all the open ports and every important city in the interior. The Chinese Postal Guide, first published in 1900, is for completeness and utility not far behind our own. Postal communication with the outside world is carried on through the agencies of the various Postal Union countries located at the treaty ports. The great volume of the business is, however, conducted through Hong-Kong. "My message

from Pong-King was the first that has been despatched from that office in the six years of its existence. This detail may serve as a sufficient description of the country," wrote a correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* in 1907. The Postmaster-General of the Straits Settlements received a petition for the reduction of rates to China. "If the prayer is not granted," the petition went on, "the results will be that the wife, not receiving information respecting the whereabouts of her husband, will contract a new marriage, and taking her children with her to follow her new lord, leave no one behind to perpetuate that ancestral worship so dear to the heart of every Chinaman. The aged parents, not hearing from their son, will be occasioned to have a thousand anxious thoughts about him, will lose their appetite and die. The sister-in-law who is a widow, and depends upon her brother-in-law for support, will starve through receiving no remittances from him. In this way many Chinese homes will be rendered wretched." In spite of this heartrending appeal the petition was not granted, and we suppose the melancholy results prophesied followed. Postal officials everywhere are supposed to be heartless, and to regard human beings as simply revenue-producing agents.

I have only attempted in this chapter to give to the reader glimpses of the Postal Administrations of a few big countries. To do anything else would require twenty chapters instead of one, and to give a complete account would involve countless statements in figures and comparative estimates. There are annual reports published by most of the Post Offices of the world, and they are very much alike in style and matter. The human touch has to be sought for in other ways and in other documents. Post Office history and economics are interesting to the student, but what interests us all are the men and women inside the Post Office, on both sides of the counter.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE POST OFFICES OF THE EMPIRE

DURING the processions which took place to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria, one of the most interesting features was the prominence given to the soldiers of the Empire. If it were possible to collect together a similar representative gathering of men who have served their sovereign in a civil capacity, a selection of the postmen of the Empire would be quite as interesting and perhaps equally picturesque. And if, in addition to the men, there could also pass through the streets of London the various means by which the mails are carried to their destination, what an object-lesson it would be in the activities of the Post Office! In this country the horse, the motor van, and the railway train are the usual bearers of his Majesty's mails—in addition, of course, to the ubiquitous postman. But the letter-carriers from other parts of the Empire would include the dog from British Columbia, the elephant from India, the camel from the Cape, and the pigeon from New Zealand.

Great Britain was the pioneer of the Penny Post, and one of the benefits now associated with her Empire is that throughout practically its whole extent a penny is the minimum charge for a letter between any particular colony and the mother country. The United States has also been included in the countries sharing this privilege, and the term "Imperial Penny Postage," which was for a long time the battle-cry of

postal reformers, has therefore ceased to have any but a sentimental meaning. It is highly probable that before many years pass European countries will also join with Great Britain in reducing the charge for international postage. Meantime, at any rate, the English-speaking nations of the world are linked together by the Penny Post. Credit must be given to Mr. Henniker Heaton and other postal reformers for the way in which, during the later years of the nineteenth century, they kept this question to the front, and educated public opinion, both in the colonies and this country, to the point of demanding the reform from the respective governments. But the times were also favourable to the accomplishment of the idea. There will always probably be great differences of opinion on various phases of Mr. Chamberlain's career; but I think future generations will be unanimous as to the value of the services he rendered to the Empire, when as Secretary of State for the Colonies he brought home to his countrymen, in a way that had never been attempted before, their responsibility to our dependencies and colonies. The linking up of the Empire by means of the Penny Post was a portion of his policy.

Let me begin with India. There had been, previous to our occupation of that country, many attempts made at establishing postal organisations; but like those in our own land previous to the seventeenth century, they were maintained not for the public but for the use of the Government. Not until the East India Company ceased to be, and the English Government took over the whole business of administration, was a really efficient postal service organised. The broad lines of the British postal system are followed in India, though the postal and telegraph administrations are separated. In the annual report you will find elaborate tables of

Post Office figures, and records which have been beaten, and until you come to the section dealing with the postal incidents during the year you might fancy you were reading a report of the British Postmaster-General. It is the table of incidents which reveals to us what service in India means to the postal servant. The figures and official language of the report do not hide from us the enormous difficulties in working the service in an immense country of over 150 separate languages, where railway journeys are reckoned by days, and where caste enters even into Post Office questions.

One of the special Indian conditions is the prevalence of plague; post offices are sometimes removed temporarily from this cause, and accommodation is found in tents. Money is given to officers who have displayed special courage in the face of exceptional risks, or it is given to the surviving representatives of men who died of plague while in the execution of their duty.

Then there are the daily risks of a service carried on in a country subject to great convulsions of Nature and where wild beasts abound. In one year this was the chapter of accidents. There were thirty-two highway robberies of the mail, of which twenty occurred in British territory and eight in native States. No life was lost, but in nineteen cases the mail carriers were more or less seriously injured. Other casualties in the same year were the loss of a mail steamer and all hands by a cyclone, the sinking of a steam launch in the Gulf of Cutch, and the wrecking of the mail train from Madras to Bombay owing to the destruction of a bridge by flood. The mail line at Gilgit was twice overwhelmed by avalanches, two runners were drowned while trying to cross flooded streams, an overseer in Assam was attacked by a wild buffalo and died of his wounds, and a village postman in Madras was mauled to death

by two bears. In Eastern Bengal a postmaster was murdered and his postman was wounded by dacoits, and another postman was murdered in a hut. As many as twenty-three post offices were burnt down, three were blown down, and three were washed away by floods.

Truly there are perils connected with the Indian postal service of which we know nothing in Great Britain.

In the chapter of accidents for another year we read of a mail runner who was carried away in broad daylight by a man-eating tiger, another mail runner was attacked by a wolf described as "the terror of the country side," but he succeeded in killing the animal after a severe struggle. "Slain by a tiger," "badly mauled by a leopard," are descriptions of the accidents to other postal servants.

Even that slow-moving animal the elephant is in some districts in India the carrier of his Majesty's mails. In the tea district may be seen post offices built on piles to get above the swamp, and the elephant is the carrier at the last stage of the journey of a letter which probably started in a limited mail train.

The typical postman of India is the runner or "harkara." The railways in that country are mostly trunk lines, and runners are employed for the whole internal network of postal lines, mail carts being used only in very few places where the weight of the mails is particularly heavy. The pay of the runner is usually not more than Rs. 5 a month; in a few districts it is as much as Rs. 7; while in others it falls to Rs. 4. This is equivalent to 7s. or 8s. a month, and on this modest sum the Indian runner can live, and perhaps bring up a family. It is said of him that "he has no idea of luxuries," and perhaps for his own sake this is fortunate.

The Department provides him with a mud stage hut, and the local landlord is often induced to give the runner a small piece of land, in cultivating which he spends most of his leisure time, and perhaps increases his salary by growing eatables which he can sell.

The runner's dress is a short white cotton coat and a dhotee tied lightly round his loins, coming nearly to the knees, so as not to interfere with the free movement of his limbs. He wears a red pugaree for a head-dress. Then he has a leather belt and a spear with bells. The bells are a concession to an old superstition, as they are supposed to frighten away evil spirits and wild animals.

The imagination of Rudyard Kipling was stirred by the runner tearing through the jungle with his staff and ringing bells. We all know the verses. I will quote two only:—

"In the name of the Empress of India make way,
Oh, lords of the jungle, wherever you roam;
The woods are astir at the close of the day—
We exiles are waiting for letters from home.
Let the robber retreat, let the tiger turn tail—
In the name of the Empress, the Overland Mail.

With a jingle of bells as the dust gathers in
He turns to the footpath that leads up the hill,
The bags on his back and a cloth round his chin,
And tucked in his waistband the post office bill—
'Despatched on this date, as received by the rail,
Per runner, two bags of the Overland Mail.'"

India has also its postwomen: I do not know whether many of them are runners. An old native woman in one district delivered letters for twenty years to the satisfaction of the inhabitants. She could neither read nor write, but her wonderful knowledge of the

place and the residents enabled her to deliver her letters with perfect correctness after the addresses had been read out to her.

India has also its humours in correspondence. Many of the postmasters of small village offices have a very superficial knowledge of the Queen's English. The vagaries of Baboo-English flourish in the Indian Post Office.

An ordinary parcel was delivered to G. Humfress, whereas it was addressed by the sender as R. Humfress. The explanation of the sub-postmaster was: "G. Humfress and R. Humfress are both wife and husband to each other. They don't object to the delivery of the parcel to their address to any one of them."

Another explanation of an error was: "Your Honor may be right, I may be wrong; I may be right and Honor wrong; let Honor give me back the fine, and then at the day of resurrection, when all hearts will be open, if I am wrong I will most gladly, Sir, return your Honor the money." This seems a fair offer.

Here is an application for a post in the service:—

"SIR,—Being educated in the Calcutta and by your favour passed B.A. examination, I now venture to approach the throne of your honour's goodness in hopes that some of the crumbs which falls from the rich man's table may be available for me.

"Sir, I am expert in many things, and desire only to be tried to show my agility in mathematics and other languages, being hopeful to stand on my own bottom without help for any if I once am made glad with the object of my desire.

"In the Bible of your honour it is said that man's life is but a span, which is equal to five inches, also it is stated few men live at so great an age as four

scores, and as my talents are now in their blooming prime they may not be rusted in obscurity by delay on the matter.

"Your honour will therefore kindly appoint me without further notice. As to the post which I am to occupy, that is left to your honour's discretion, who being an allwise man will no doubt judge it properly."

A Superintendent once received a petition for leave. It started with "Sir," the second paragraph with "Honoured Sir," the third with "Your Honour," the fourth with "My Lord," and it wound up with the statement that he knew the Superintendent was of very good family, and therefore could not do any injustice. The writer concluded, "I am, your Royal Highness."

A district traffic superintendent received this telegram:

"SIR,—Here is every one dying on account of cholera. Kindly grant us leave. Ve go by first train, in anticipation of sanction. What can poor baboos give in exchange of his soul?"

The following are literal translations of addresses of native letters, taken indiscriminately from unclaimed letters in the General Post Office, Calcutta:—

"Through the favour of God—May this cover, having arrived at Burdwan, close to Khanpookhureen, and reached Chhukka Moollah, be presented to and read by the blessed light of my eye, Meean Booddhoo—may the Almighty protect him."

"To the sacred feet of the chief worshipful, the respected brother Goozoopershad Singh. The Letter to be given at Calcutta in the direction of Jorasanku at the house of Tarinee Sen—on arrival at which the said Singh will receive it. The Letter is an urgent one, so let it reach quickly."

It will be recognised that the Returned Letter Offices of India have their own special problems.

The Post Offices of the Empire

India has derived much advantage from the Value-Payable Post, or, as it is sometimes spoken of, the Cash on Delivery system. The Post Office undertakes to deliver an article, and recover from the addressee the amount specified by the sender, and to pay this amount to him, after deducting commission. When it was proposed, some years ago, to adopt the system in Great Britain, there was considerable objection raised by the trading community, and the idea was abandoned as far as this country is concerned. But it is being extended to certain colonies, and certainly the example of India goes to show that it supplies a demand in our colonies and dependencies. It has created in India a new kind of retail business, and several large firms have sprung up at the Presidency towns which trade with constituents mostly residing in the country.

In India letters containing dutiable articles undeclared must be opened by the addressee, possibly in some remote up-country stations in presence of the local postmaster, and then reported to Bombay or Karachi for assessment of duty before final delivery. The delay caused by this rather clumsy procedure often causes great annoyance to the public, and I have been told of a vigorous protest made by a peppery colonel, who had received back a set of false teeth from home which had gone away for repairs. When he was informed they must go to Karachi for assessment of duty he became livid with rage, slapped the teeth into his mouth, and bade the Empire to do what it could to get them out. He had been in practical retirement while the teeth were away, and he was now going into society again, duty or no duty.

The Post Office in South Africa works in some respects under conditions similar to those in India. Here also the railways are mostly trunk lines, and

here also the runner is a feature of the service. His difficulties are sometimes as great as those of his colleague in India. A lengthy detention of the mails took place in one district because the native runner who had charge of them was attacked on his run by two ostriches. He had to take refuge in a small bush which the ostriches guarded all day, and it was not until the night had set in, and the ostriches were perhaps, like other sentries, getting sleepy, that he escaped in the dark. Like their colleagues in India, the South African runners do not trouble themselves with much clothing; they arrange the mail bag on the end of a stick, and on the other they fasten their blanket, sandals, "tin billy" for cooking, and some mealie tied on a piece of cloth, the stick being put on the shoulder.

Among the correspondence brought into a town by a runner was found a large scorpion measuring seven inches in length. Flooded rivers and heavy rains interrupt the mail service, while on the other hand severe droughts are often a trial, and we read in the Postmaster-General's report of seven camels having to be withdrawn from service because of exhaustion from this cause. It is not surprising to learn that motor cars are likely to be substituted.

While excavating for the new railway buildings at Capetown recently some workmen found a considerable number of curious old Post Office stones. Years ago it was the regular practice with the commanders of the English and Dutch East India Companies' fleets to leave a package of letters under large stones on the shore to be taken to Europe by the next home-going fleet. These stones all bear rudely carved inscriptions asking the passer-by to "look hereunder for letters." Then follow the names of the commander and of the ship, with the dates of arrival and departure. Three

hundred years ago there was, of course, no settlement of Europeans on the shores of Table Bay, but our own fleets and those of the Dutch East India Company called there regularly.

The picture which appears on this page is of one of the stones under which the ships' letters were placed.

I am only dealing in this chapter with special features of the postal service which belong to each country, and I cannot, therefore, talk at any length concerning the fine service of posts, and of activities connected with the



posts, which are administered by the South African Government. The business, especially in the Transvaal, is of great magnitude. Much of this would simply be the story of the British Post Office over again.

In British Central Africa the Post Office has developed much of recent years. Sir H. H. Johnston, K.C.B., has said of the district that it is interesting to note the extent to which the postal service is used by the natives themselves, who directly they are able to write in their own language have a passion for correspondence, and they

develop a childish pleasure in affixing postage stamps. Nowhere are there such faithful postmen or runners; they will stick to the mail bag to the point of death. Negroes are admirable imitators, and in consequence they make excellent Civil Servants, whose duty it is to write reports and letters in the style of their official superiors. Here is a letter from a Gold Coast postman to his postmaster :—

"DEAR MASTER,—I have the pleasure to regret to inform you that when I go bath this morning a billow he remove my trouser. Dear master, how can I go on duty with only one trouser? If he get loss where am I? Kindly write Accra that they send me one more trouser, and so I catch him and go duty. Good-day, sir. My God, how are you? Your loving corporal."

Note how readily the man adopts not only official phrases, but what is probably the unofficial language of his postmaster.

Leopards are more common than lions in Central Africa; but they are usually more anxious to steal sheep or other small domestic animals than to encounter men or women. A young telegraph operator was sent to a lonely station in the remote regions of Central Africa. From the small cabin which served as his dwelling and his office he could hear the roar of lions from a distance. This having occurred several times during the few days after his arrival, he became very much terrified, and despatched a wire to headquarters :—

"Impossible to live here. Surrounded day and night by lions, elephants, rhinoceroses, tigers, hyenas, wolves, crocodiles, hippopotami, &c. Beg for transfer."

No reply was received, but a visitor who came to see him one day explained that this was probably because headquarters considered the telegram ridiculous, especially as there were no wolves in that part of Africa.

The forlorn operator immediately sent another wire. "Referring to my wire No. X, please cancel the word wolves." But he was not recalled.

The relations of a Central African postmaster to his native staff are something like that of a feudal lord towards his tenants. All sorts of petty and private matters are brought to him for decision. Here is a report of a native official to his postmaster of a domestic difficulty which had been brought before him. "Njokomera take Massie, daughter of Chokabwino, to wife without pay for her. Now this court sentence Njokomera to pay Chokabwino one cow. Cow paid—case dismissed. Japeth." The treatment of this difficult case should have ensured the native official rapid promotion.

The climate of Central Africa is of course exceedingly trying to the white man, and there is a rather well-known story of the English applicant for a Central African postmastership asking the Colonial Office what were the arrangements as to pension. And he received the gruesome reply that the question had not yet arisen.

In an old country like England, where vested interests oppose the reformer at every step he takes, where conservative influences dominate all classes, the individual statesman can achieve comparatively little. Go to a new country and you will find a different state of things. Even in the adoption of modern conveniences and scientific improvements, the colonies are often ahead of the mother country. And this is mainly due to the fact that in these countries precedent has not been elevated to the position of a divine commandment.

It was therefore only to be expected, that the first move towards making Imperial Penny Postage an accomplished fact should come from the colonies, and it was natural, and in accordance with the law which seems to govern these things, that the old country should

have been only too willing to hold to the old ways so long as it was possible for her to do so with dignity. To the Hon. William Mulock, K.C., Postmaster-General of Canada in 1898, belongs the credit of having forced the hand of Great Britain. While Great Britain was considering the matter, his Government announced that on and from a certain date one penny would be the charge for letters weighing two ounces from Canada to Great Britain. For other colonies to follow suit was then only a matter of time, and in fact they very soon adopted the new policy. It was the year following the Diamond Jubilee that saw the great change: there had been created in people's minds the sense of the oneness of the British Empire, and it was felt that the most tangible way of bringing this fact permanently home to the nation was in making 1d. the uniform charge to and from every country which gave allegiance to the British sovereign. To many minds there must be something wrong in the idea of the postage being 2½d. to Paris and 1d. to Quebec, but there was something which appealed to the imagination in even this distinction. It was the privilege of the British subject. Canada at that time was deriving no revenue from her Post Office; and it is a fact that nations in such circumstances seem more inclined to be liberal in Post Office matters than those which are making a profit out of the business.

The great colonies of Australia and New Zealand have services largely modelled on that of Great Britain. They too have sometimes improved upon the methods of the mother country. Old age pensions were the rule in New Zealand several years before we paid them, and the business is done through the Post Office. New Zealand adopted in 1909 the home savings bank safes, which two years later Great Britain began to experi-

ment with for the benefit of her savings bank depositors. The zeal of our colonies for statistics and official reports is astonishing. Canada is especially rich in such efforts, and New Zealand runs her very close. The New Zealand Year Book is a most exhaustive publication; it gives you statistics of everything connected with the country. You can tell at a glance how many letters, newspapers, parcels, and postcards are delivered to the individual New Zealander. New Zealand appears even to take a census of its pigs.

Australia, with its scattered population and long distances to be travelled, finds a difficulty in working the Post Office as a paying concern, but she is not behind other colonies in the conveniences she offers. Englishmen arrive there, and expect, as they always do in countries other than their own, to find a lower civilisation. The Australians delight in "pulling the legs" of these gentlemen. A Sydney coach-driver, backed up by his passengers, induced a young man newly arrived from England to believe that kangaroos were now used in that district as letter carriers. "They meet the coach," he said, "and I give them their master's letters, which they put in their pouches and carry home." The freshman was incredulous, but just then a great kangaroo hopped on to the roadway right in front of them, and stood for a moment looking at the advancing coach. "Nothing for you to-day," shouted the driver, and the animal, turning, disappeared in the shrub from which it had come.

The young Englishman was struck with wonder at the strides made in so young a nation as Australia.

There are mountainous districts in New South Wales where the journey of a letter carrier has to be performed at nearly 5000 feet above the level of the sea, and this necessitates the use of ski or snow shoes. In

the Australian bush they have a quaint and picturesque custom which is for the convenience of the squatters and miners. A wooden box is set up by the side of one of the chief trails or pathways. Ranchers come there from a great distance and drop in their letters. The boxes are cleared once a week, and the postman who does this work also brings the letters for the ranchers, and puts them in a compartment of the box set apart for them.

In 1899 a pigeon post was established in New Zealand between Auckland and Great Barrier Island, which contained about one hundred inhabitants. The island is sixty miles from Auckland; there was no cable communication, and a steamer only once a week. At the outset each bird carried one message only, at the cost of two shillings, but subsequent experiments proved the birds could carry four sheets of tissue paper of quarto size, and the rate was reduced to sixpence per message of one sheet. Wireless telegraphy is, however, displacing the pigeon as a messenger everywhere; even the British Admiralty has discontinued its pigeon service, which had attained a high standard of efficiency.

I have stated in a previous chapter that the whole tendency of postal administrations all over the world is towards uniformity of method, and this applies especially to the post offices of the Empire. The emigrant, perhaps, feels more at home in a colonial post office than in any other place in his new country. And this feeling is only in part due to the fact that the post office links him up with Great Britain. It seems to him really a bit of the old home.

CHAPTER XIX

THE POSTMASTER-GENERAL AND THE PERMANENT STAFF

IF the Post Office were a private or joint-stock company, the office of Postmaster-General would be an anachronism; the Secretary would be the Chairman of the Company, and the Assistant Secretaries would be the Board of Management. I do not pretend that this is an accurate estimate of what would happen if the Post Office were disestablished, but there is no doubt that the duties of the Chairman and Board of Management in a business undertaking correspond very closely to those performed by the Secretary of the Post Office and his Assistants.

The State, however, controls the Post Office, and the necessity therefore arises for the supreme head of the Department to be a member of the Government of the day, and under this arrangement the position of the Secretary resembles somewhat that of the general manager of a company.

Now the part which a Postmaster-General takes in the control of the Department depends very largely on his own inclination and strength of character. He is a bird of passage; the changes and chances of parliamentary life bring about a rapid succession of Postmasters-General, and the office is often regarded in Government circles as merely a stepping-stone to higher things. The Postmaster-General has to defend the policy and conduct of his Department in Parliament,

and he has to pilot through the House in which he may be sitting all measures relating to the Post Office. He has magnificent opportunities, and as he is the largest employer of labour in the country, his policy on all industrial and working-class questions is a matter of national concern.

We often hear the question asked, "Does a change of Postmaster-General make any difference to the Post Office?" A change certainly makes sometimes a great difference to the staff. When Mr. Sydney Buxton became Postmaster-General in 1905 he immediately took a step which has had far-reaching consequences. He announced that he would recognise officially the associations of the employés, and he was prepared to deal with grievances of the staff through representatives from the associations. That may or may not have been a step dictated by political considerations; but my point is that it was done by the personal action of the Postmaster-General. Moreover, the effect of this policy has been to set an example to other large employers of labour in the country, and in dealing with the grievances of their servants many have followed the lead of the Post Office.

A change of Postmaster-General may also affect considerably the public. In modern times Mr. Fawcett and Mr. Raikes have been the Postmasters-General who perhaps made their influence felt most at the Post Office and in the country. Mr. Fawcett brought to his duties a knowledge of finance and a keen interest in Post Office problems. He infused a certain enthusiasm for reforming schemes into the administrative staff, and the years of his rule were busy and fruitful of results. He possessed ideas of his own as to what the Post Office might be to the nation, and his premature death was regretted by none more keenly than by Post Office servants.

The Postmaster-General and Staff

Mr. Raikes, with a personality less pleasing than that of Mr. Fawcett, was a man of great independence and force of character, and he depended less for his policy on the permanent staff than has been the case with most Postmasters-General. He was confronted with many difficulties arising out of the dissatisfaction of large numbers of the staff; but he faced all questions with courage and determination, and he too left his mark on the Department. It is a striking fact that Mr. Fawcett and Mr. Raikes, who were indefatigable workers, and who both went through times of great official anxiety, should have died in harness. I do not wish to imply that all Postmasters-General who survive their term of office are weak and indifferent chiefs; but these two instances show the enormous strain which is in modern times put upon a Minister who attempts seriously to grapple with the multifarious questions and anxieties of his Department. It must always be remembered, too, in considering what is expected of a Postmaster-General, that he usually comes to his duties without any experience of the technical work and routine of the Department, and if he takes his work very seriously he is perpetually being obliged to acquire knowledge at very short notice. He has not only to convince Parliament of the rightness of his policy; he has also to argue the matter out with the permanent officials, who know all the ropes, and can obstruct his schemes by their superior knowledge of the practical difficulties.

Mr. Chamberlain in speaking on one occasion, when Secretary of State for the Colonies, to a body of Civil Servants, said: "You are aware that the human race is divided into two great categories—those who are members of the Civil Service and those who are not. But even the Civil Service may be subdivided into those who are permanent and non-political and those who are political

and temporary, who come like shadows and so depart. I have a shrewd suspicion that you could do without us. But I have an absolute conviction that we could not do without you."

These words apply exactly to the relations of a Postmaster-General to his staff. And the staff would reply to such words that while they do the work whether their political chief is present or not, he has frequently the capacity to inspire them, and he has the public reputation which confers distinction on the Department. He can at least modify the dull rule of the permanent official.

Many distinguished men have held the position of Secretary of the Post Office. Of these no one was more indefatigable or rendered greater services to the Department than Sir Francis Freeling in the early years of the nineteenth century. To him was chiefly due the speeding up of the mail coach service. The acceptance of the position by Sir Rowland Hill gave a distinction to the office which it has never since lost. He was followed by Sir John Tilley, who was the last Secretary to be appointed from the staff of the Post Office. The men who have been appointed since his day have usually come from posts outside in which they have made a name. Sir Arthur Blackwood was Secretary for sixteen years, and he came from the Treasury. The Treasury always keeps a watchful eye on the Post Office, which is a revenue-earning Department, and the somewhat extravagant outlay on the purchase of the telegraphs was not at all pleasing to the Treasury. So Sir Arthur Blackwood, steeped in Treasury traditions, was sent to watch over the Post Office. He was known outside the Department as a religious enthusiast and an active philanthropist. He was a man of fine presence and great personal charm—he had been known in society in his

youth as "Beauty Blackwood," and though in matters of religion he gave the impression of being extremely rigid and unbending, he was as an official exceedingly wily and diplomatic. The late Sir Spencer Walpole, who succeeded him, had previously been Governor of the Isle of Man; he was a writer, and had published a *History of England from* 1815.

The Assistant Secretaries have included several men who were not only able administrators, but who were known outside the walls of the office. In another chapter I have spoken of Mr. Frank Ives Scudamore, C.B., who was one of the most remarkable men who ever served in the Post Office. Mr. Herbert Joyce, C.B., was an Assistant Secretary, and he wrote a *History of the Post Office* which is the standard work on the subject. Mr. F. E. Baines, C.B., was also an able administrator. He rendered valuable services during the period of the transfer of the telegraphs and in the organisation of the parcel post. He was an official with ideas, and he possessed what is rare in a permanent official, the quality of enthusiasm. He has published two books, *Forty Years at the Post Office* and *On the Track of the Mail Coach*, which are important contributions to the history of the Post Office. Mr. H. Buxton Forman, C.B., who was long associated with the foreign business of the Department, is known also as the editor and biographer of Keats, and as the author of several works dealing with the Keats and Shelley circles.

The Comptroller and Accountant-General is the keeper of the purse at St. Martin's le Grand. He is practically the financial adviser of the Postmaster-General, and his Department keeps the accounts. Centralisation is the great feature of Post Office business, and in nothing is this more marked than in financial matters. The postmasters' accounts throughout the whole of the country

pass through the office, and the money needed to carry on the work is advised to the postmasters by the Accountant-General's Department. The balance-sheet of the Post Office is a formidable document. Take, for instance, the year ending 31st March 1910. The receipts from all sources amounted to £23,625,710, while the expenditure was £19,845,746, and the net revenue was therefore £3,779,964. Bear in mind that these huge sums are made up for the most part of very small items and daily accounts, and you will have some idea of the work performed in the Accountant-General's Department. All salaries and pensions are also paid from this office. Mr. Herbert Samuel, the Postmaster-General, wittily described the work of this branch of the Service at a departmental dinner in 1911:—

"The Department was always there, watching the flow of money through the Post Office system, ready to pounce on anything wrong, just as certain corpuscles in our blood were ready to deal with any foreign substance in our systems. In fact, the staff of the Accountant-General's Department were the guardian corpuscles of the Post Office system, and without them the Post Office could not be maintained in health and efficiency. Over 200 millions of public money passed through the hands of Post Office officials, and it was the duty of the Department to see that it did pass through. (Laughter.) Every year some 20 millions of money were spent on Post Office work, and it was their duty to see that those 20 millions were properly spent. Of course the Accountant-General's Department itself cost a large sum of money, and he was not sure that it would not be cheaper to be cheated. (Loud laughter.) It was the duty of their Department to throw upon the scaring proposals of imaginative men—not the cold light of reason, that was done by the Solicitor's Department—(laughter)—

but the even colder light of arithmetic. (Cheers and laughter)." I quote from a report in the *Civilian*.

The Engineer-in-Chief is a man whose duties have developed enormously during recent years. The telegraph and the telephone demand mechanical genius and considerable scientific attainments. A huge army of engineers is maintained to keep the telegraph and telephone plant in proper condition, and to organise new lines. The position of Engineer-in-Chief has been held by Sir William Preece and Sir John Gavey, and both men have big reputations in the scientific world. Sir William Preece has done much to popularise the knowledge of the working of electricity by his writings.

The Surveyor's establishment is responsible for the supervision of the post offices in town and country. Each Surveyor is responsible for a certain district of the country, and he has to arrange for the periodical visitation of every post office in his visit, and to have the accounts checked. The Assistant Surveyor is "the bus jumper" of the Post Office. The Surveyor also deals generally with the organisation of the service in his part of the country. Anthony Trollope, whom we have mentioned in a previous chapter, was a Surveyor of the Post Office in Ireland for many years.

I have passed rapidly in view the various posts held by men who are the chief official advisers of the Postmaster-General. But of course there is a Solicitor to the Post Office, and in a business undertaking which is constantly entering into new contracts, and dealing with claims from the public, the position is no sinecure.

There remain the big clerical establishments of the Head Offices for me to deal with. How can I best describe their functions in the service? In the early part of the nineteenth century, a letter was addressed to

the Secretary of the Post Office by the Lord Salisbury of that time in these words:—

"Pray send me word by the Bearer whether the Place in my disposal in the Bye Letter Office is fit for a Gentleman's Son. SALISBURY.

"20*th Feb.* 1820."

The Secretary replied:—

"MY LORD,—I consider the place in the Bye Letter Office to be fit for a *Gentleman's Son*, if that Gentleman be poor and wants to provide for his children. At all events it is an appointment for none but the son of a respectable man.

"I have the honour to be, &c.,

"F. FREELING."

This rebuke to the haughty Cecil was richly merited, and Sir Francis Freeling deserves credit for standing up for his office. His *esprit de corps* was aroused, and he was not the man to remain silent when discredit was thrown on the Post Office. But the doubt as to the fitness of the Post Office service for the sons of gentlemen exists to-day among people who associate the Post Office only with the sticking on of stamps and the delivery of letters. And even in the eyes of the Treasury the Post Office has suffered because of its commercial associations, and the great spending departments, such as the War Office and the Admiralty, have usually received more honours and attention.

In the old days, when places in the Civil Service were filled by the nominees of peers and politicians, there was no competition to enter the Post Office so long as positions could be found in West End offices. There was usually an uncomfortable suspicion in the candidate's

mind that the Post Office required a full day's work from every man. There was a Commission of Revenue Inquiry in 1823. One of the Commissioners questioned the Secretary of the Irish Post Office thus:—

"It appears one of the surveyors, Mr. Bushe, avowedly does no duty at all. When he received his office, did you or not consider him as receiving an office with certain duties attached to it?"

"Certainly."

"Did you ever call upon him to perform his duty?"

"I did indeed call upon him to do his duty once, and his answer was that he would never do any, for that he held his office during good behaviour, and was determined therefore to do nothing wrong."

"Did you suggest to him that doing nothing at all was perfectly consistent with good behaviour?"

The Secretary's answer was evasive, and we are forced to the conclusion that he thought Mr. Bushe's position reasonable. It appeared also that though Mr. Bushe performed no duties, he exercised his privilege of sending his letters free. Mr. Bushe might have had a distinguished career in some of the other public offices at that date, and he might have been rewarded with a title on retirement. But even in 1823 he was out of place at the Post Office. It was evidently no place for a gentleman's son.

The clerical establishment of the Post Office consists almost entirely of men and women who have entered the service through open competition. A limited number belong to the Higher Division of the Service, having passed the examination for that body, but the majority of men clerks have entered the service through the Second Division, and if they have attained to higher posts it has been by seniority or merit. Promotion is slow, and while human nature in the higher officials remains in an imperfect state, advancement does not always fall to

the most deserving. The conflicting qualifications of seniority and merit have their own times and seasons for application. At one time seniority is emphasised: at another time merit: on the whole the man who possesses both has the best chance.

The Civil Service is not a field which provides scope for a variety of different characters and temperaments. Forty-nine out of fifty posts are of a more or less routine character, and the men who succeed are often those whose minds move with ease in a groove, or they are men who, by long practice and severe discipline, have trained their minds to act with the finish and regularity of a machine. Some of the most successful men in the lower branches of the Service, when promoted to positions where some initiative and diplomacy are required, are obvious failures. The very name "permanent official" is with some people a byword for red-tapeism, obstinacy, circumlocution, and want of imagination, and this is often due to the fact, that owing to their training in the lower branches, many of these men belong to the type who make excellent servants but indifferent masters. Officialism enters into the very tissue of their being. They have allowed it to grow upon them until it has sucked up every trace of healthy variety or originality they may have formerly possessed, and though they be promoted to high places and obtain large salaries, they too often bring the service to discredit in the eyes of the public. It is not because they do not possess sufficient zeal: it is rather because they are righteous overmuch.

Some time ago there was a discussion in the *Grand Magazine* entitled "The Secret of Success in the Civil Service," conducted by men such as Sir George Kekewich, Sir Algernon West, Sir Spencer Walpole, Lord Welby, and others. All these men had held high positions in

the Service, and their opinions on "the secret" ought to be of some interest to us. But there was no agreement among them. Sir George Kekewich suggested that if you are "socially desirable" everything is open to you. Sir Henry Primrose thought that intelligence is useful, if it is accompanied by good health and industry. Sir Spencer Walpole, with doubtless pleasant recollections of the ways of postal agitators, suggested that a capacity for expressing themselves marks successful Civil Servants. Lord Welby advised perseverance and the patience to wait, while Sir Francis Mowatt recommended trustworthiness and the will to succeed. And he was the only one of the writers to suggest that the confidence of a man's fellows is an important item. His words are wise, and I quote them: "He must determine that his colleagues *shall* regard him as a good fellow. It is a term not easy to define, but we all know what it means. A good fellow does not give himself airs, is courteous to all he works with or comes in contact with, helps and encourages his juniors, and sets his face against all that he knows to be bad form." Let us take off our hats to Sir Francis Mowatt. We have no patience with those who talk official platitudes in retirement.

Sir George Kekewich was, however, the only practical man of the whole bunch. He said that "jobbery will never be eliminated from the Civil Service, nor the most efficient men placed at its head, nor the way opened for merit from the very bottom to the very top, until there is established a proper Board of Promotion."

In a previous number of the same magazine was published a series of explanations of "Success in Literature" by prominent literary men, and it was interesting to notice how candid and genuine and modest were the confessions compared with those of the distinguished Civil Servants. The Civil Servant, even when he is a

retired official, seems unable to use his pen without experiencing the necessity to be cautious and commonplace. We can almost hear him saying to himself: "The Civil Service, as we know it, is an organised hypocrisy. But we must not give the show away: we must talk to the public as we used to talk to our subordinates: we must uphold the supremacy of the copybooks."

As far as I can make out from the admissions of the leading lights of all the professions in this country, the Civil Service is the only career which secures advancement from the very bottom to the very top, as the reward of a simple observance of the law of right and wrong. The lawyer, the artist, the literary man, and the doctor, all admit in these discussions that a certain degree of artfulness, social influence, and eagerness to take advantage of other folks' weakness, are conducive to success in the different professions; it is only when we come to examine the claims of the Civil Service that we find leading authorities unanimous on the point, that stern and unbending uprightness is the sole road to success. It is an astonishing claim, and it almost takes our breath away. The air men breathe in the Civil Service seems too light and rare to support human life. We are on the mountain top when the Civil Service chiefs talk to us. Even the Church confesses to a wise respect for private patronage, and curates are advised to marry into bishops' families. But nothing helps men in the Service except diligent attention to their duties. It was stated by an official witness before a parliamentary commission that there was nothing, except, perhaps, the intervention of a member of Parliament, to prevent a sorter rising to be chief of his Department. The road exists, and to walk along it requires only ability and perseverance. But the most that we can fairly say about such a matter is

that the thing is possible, but the immense numbers who make up the Post Office staff render promotion into the higher ranks accessible only for the few. The influences which keep a man down or send him up, irrespective of merit, are as strong in the Post Office as they are in other business undertakings. For one thing, the age limit does not allow sufficient time for the exercise of those qualities of patience and perseverance, which we are told in books on Self-Help are necessary in order to attain our ambitions.

But it is easy to be cynical and to make jokes on the subject of promotion in the Civil Service. The fact remains that in spite of all disadvantages the clerical work of the Post Office is performed in a very efficient manner. There is, perhaps, less wastage of time and force in the Post Office than in any other public institution. And the Post Office clerk has many compensations. He has definite hours of work; he has security for leisure time and security of tenure; he has a good annual holiday; and above all he has the promise of a pension. In some departments his work is extremely interesting; in others it is abominably dull. And good work is always appreciated by his chiefs and by the public. In these commercial days we define the word "appreciation" only in terms of £ *s. d.*; we are in danger of losing the full meaning of the word. The fact is, every decent man craves for appreciation by his fellows; it is the noblest thing about him; and a man who professes to be superior to this craving, and demands only payment in hard cash, has the experience of centuries against him. For this reason the *esprit de corps* of the Post Office service is most marked. Lord Rosebery some years ago endeavoured to make "efficiency" a battle-cry for the nation; but so far as the clerical work of the Post Office is concerned he

was preaching to the converted. The Post Office man simply smiled as the self-righteous man does in church when he thinks how admirably suited the sermon is to his sinful neighbours. But when self-righteousness is the act of a body and not of an individual it is called *esprit de corps*, and becomes not a sin but a virtue.

If the high officials of the Post Office have included men who are known in other than Civil Service circles, this is equally true of the clerical establishment. Among them have been authors, artists, sculptors, and musicians. "The extra subject" may or may not help them in their official careers; it certainly enables them to sustain with greater philosophy the routine and the disappointments of office life. Mr. Alfred Parsons, R.A., was a Savings Bank clerk early in his career; so was during many years Mr. W. W. Jacobs, the author of *Many Cargoes* and *Sea Urchins*.

A growing proportion of the permanent clerical staff consists of women. At present they are restricted mainly to the account work of the Department; they keep the ledgers of the Savings Bank, they do work in the Money Order and Postal Order offices, and in the Accountant-General's Department. Their scales of pay are as a rule considerably lower than those of the men clerks, and hitherto they have been employed by the State mainly on account of economy. But the women have great ambitions; they have an association, the chief demand of which is equal pay for men and women, and entrance to the Service by the same examination. The advance and success of the woman's movement have had a great influence on the ambitions and hopes of the women clerks, and female employment in the Post Office is probably entering on a new phase. The economical advantage to the State is already not so marked as it used to be, as the commencing salaries of

large numbers of the male staff have been reduced, and there is one department at least where the women in their earlier years of service are paid higher salaries than are large numbers of the men. If this latter policy is pursued it means the beginning of a revolution and the upsetting of the old-fashioned social order. The women do their work excellently, and they only ask to be allowed to establish their claim to be able to perform the highest duties that are given to clerks in the Post Office. The women also, it will be seen, are becoming possessed by *esprit de corps*, the note of the permanent staff of the General Post Office.

I have only one word to say in conclusion. *Esprit de corps* is a virtue I have claimed for the permanent staff; but this virtue, like all others, has its defects, and one of these is the state of mind which it induces in an official, to look at his Department as an organisation which has already done a maximum amount of good for the public. If you mildly suggest that much remains to be accomplished, he is apt to regard your remark as a want of confidence in himself. It is this attitude on his part which often explains the bad reputation which the term "permanent official" occupies in the minds of the public.

CHAPTER XX

THE HEAD POSTMASTER

THE supporters of an Established Church have often argued that the presence in any town or village of a State official pledged to the promotion of righteousness and the spiritual life is a national asset, and that it is to the advantage of every citizen to have a centre of sweet reasonableness provided for him at the rectory or vicarage. It is certainly a tradition of English country life to look to the clergyman of a parish to take the lead in many local matters, especially in those of a philanthropic character. But there is also in every village and town another State official who in consequence of the varied nature of his duties is the guide and counsellor of the public in a number of their temporal concerns, and who is by virtue of his office appealed to constantly on matters which lie far outside his official labours. For he is always "On his Majesty's Service," and he is expected to live up to that position, to be a walking *Encyclopædia Britannica*, a local *Who's Who?* a financial adviser, a boarding and lodging house agent, and to know everything, in fact, which the clergyman does not know, and is not expected to know. The Post Office is regarded not so much as a centre of sweet reasonableness as a centre of light and information which can be applied to without money and without price. The growth in the importance of the office of postmaster has been continuous since the earliest days of the Service, and this is of course easily explained by the story of the Post Office

which I have been telling. At first, as I have already pointed out, the postmaster was usually an innkeeper. He provided horses for the King's posts, and it has to be admitted that for this purpose he selected as a rule the worst that were in his possession. The duty of receiving and despatching letters was left to a waiter or chambermaid, and frequently, as there was no separate place set apart for Post Office work, letters were sorted in the bar. A surveyor reported on one occasion that "the head ostler was often the postmaster's prime minister on matters relating to the mails." When the mail coaches were put on the road, it was felt desirable that the innkeepers should no longer be postmasters, and a change was gradually introduced in the conditions under which the office was held. For a great number of years in most towns of the kingdom the postmastership was held by a local tradesman, and he carried on his own business at the same time, just as sub-postmasters do at the present day.

The change was certainly for the benefit of the public, and the mail service was treated more seriously by the postmaster. In some ways he was a more important public servant than he is to-day. In the days before telegraphy he was also a central news agency. A circular was issued to all postmasters in 1812 in these terms :—

"To all Postmasters, G.P.O.

"*April* 1812.

"It has long been an instruction to many of the postmasters and agents that they should transmit to me for the information of his Majesty's Postmaster-General an immediate account of all remarkable occurrences, that the same may be communicated if necessary to

his Majesty's principal Secretaries of State, and you will not fail to act in conformity thereto. Your assured friend,

"FRANCIS FREELING, *Secretary.*"

That injunction has become a dead letter, and the most that a postmaster is expected to do in this direction is to note any references in the local press to matters relating to the Department, and to send copies of the newspapers to the Secretary, General Post Office.

With the growth of Post Office business, the Head Postmaster has become a Civil Servant: he is now provided with an office of his own, and he usually gives up his time to the Service. A Head Postmaster is not allowed to interest himself in any business, such as banking, insurance, or parcels delivery, which would bring him into competition with his own Department. Unlike the centre of sweet reasonableness at the vicarage, he is compelled to be absolutely neutral at election times, and the postmaster is expected at all times to be discreet and guarded in the expression of his political views. Sometimes, therefore, it happens that the centre of sweet reasonableness is really at the post office and not at the vicarage.

In the old days a knowledge of horses was the chief requirement in a postmaster, but year by year additions have been made to his work, and he is now required to be not only a smart business man but to know a great deal concerning many different activities. He is responsible for the despatch and delivery of the mail service in his district, but he also has to look after a large banking business, including money order and postal order systems: he has to know something of telegraphy and of the telephone, and in addition to his Post Office business he does work for the Inland Revenue,

such as the sale of Inland Revenue and Fee Stamps and the granting of dog, gun, establishment, motor, and game licences. And the latest duties which have been placed upon him are the payment of old age pensions and the working of a portion of the National Insurance Scheme.

At the Head Office in London every official has to specialise more or less, but a Head Postmaster cannot afford to do this. In addition to the various duties I have mentioned, he has to manage a large staff of men, to preserve discipline, and to see that the sub-postmasters of his district are performing their duties properly.

Undoubtedly the status of the postmaster has risen considerably, and in large towns he occupies a high and influential position among the men of business. His immediate superior as a rule is the surveyor of his district, but the postmasters of the largest towns in the United Kingdom are their own surveyors. These postmasterships are the prizes of the professions, and they include Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester, Glasgow, Bristol, Leeds, Newcastle-on-Tyne, Belfast, Cardiff, Nottingham, Sheffield, and Hull. The salaries attached to these posts vary from £725 to £1000, and the postmasters are frequently Civil Servants who have passed the highest examinations on entering the Service, and they are invariably men of superior education, ability, and experience. Yet so long does it take to root out an old association of ideas in the mind of the British public, that a postmaster is still regarded in the minds of many people as merely a man who sells stamps and perhaps fancy articles.

Let me take the city of Liverpool as an illustration of how the growth of Post Office business has raised the importance of the postmaster. In the year 1775 there was only one postman in the town, and by the year 1900 the numbers had risen to 800. It is true that in 1775 the

staff was already considered inadequate. A petition was sent up to London in that year asking for another postman, but it was not granted. The reply, however, did not deal with the necessities of the case, but declined to accede to the petitioners' request on the ground that "not more than one letter carrier has yet been allowed to any one town in England." So firmly established even then was the power of precedent in the official mind. In the year 1839 the weekly number of letters and newspapers dealt with at Liverpool amounted to 103,201, and in 1900 the number had risen to 4,823,694. Of course, all the other large towns in the Kingdom could show similar increases in proportion to their size, and these figures take no account of the increases in other kinds of Post Office business which have been equally significant.

Let me take as another illustration the city of Bristol. Here we have a city which in the race for priority of position has been "passed over" by younger and more pushful rivals like Liverpool and Hull. Yet the growth of the Post Office business here has been extraordinary. There is an old official record which consists of an application by a postmaster of Bristol for an increase in his salary. The request was granted by the Postmaster-General in the following minute, which is dated 13th December 1686: it is addressed to the Governor of Bristol. "You are therefore of opinion that the said salary (£50) is very small considering the expense the petitioner is att and his extraordinary trouble, Bristoll being a greate Citty, but you say that you doe not think all the things he setts down in the aforesaid accompt ought to be allowed him, the example being of very ill consequence, for (as you informe me) you doe not allow either candles, pack-thread, wax, ink, penns or paper to any of the postmasters, nor office rent, nor returns of money;

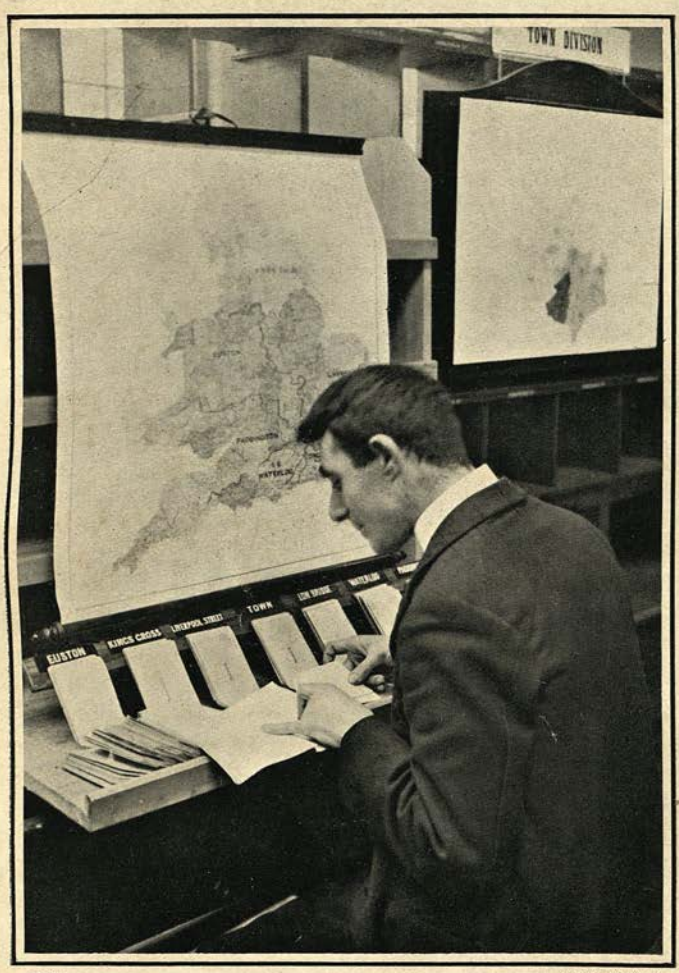


Photo *Clarke & Hyde.*

THE SORTING SCHOOL.

This pupil is busy learning general sorting—that is, dividing the mail into districts. Notice the map of England and the names of the London railway termini in front of him.

you are therefore of opinion that tenn pounds per annum to his former salary of £50 will be a reasonable allowance, and the petitioner will be therefore well satisfied: these are therefore to pray and require you to raise his salary from £50 to £60 accordingly."

The General Post Office has altered very much in its methods since those days, but the care with which it evidently sifted a claim for increase of pay two hundred years ago is equally marked to-day if we are to believe the almost unanimous verdict of Post Office servants. Certainly this particular concession does not appear to have been extravagant. We are reminded indeed of the waiter's remark to David Copperfield, "Never mind the ink; I lose by that." The Bristol Post Office has advanced since those days. Even so late as 1855, the staff numbered only 80; at the present time it is considerably over 1500.

The smaller towns show similar increases in proportion to their population. Even where the population is stationary, there is increase: the post office is more in request by the inhabitants. Rarely, indeed, is there a tale to tell of decline. There is one curious instance in recent years of a Head Office being reduced to the rank of a sub-office on account of bad times, and it is curious because the explanation lies back in the mail coaching days. Bawtry is the first town in Yorkshire, on the Great North Road, and it was here that in olden times the High Sheriff of the county was accustomed to meet kings and queens on their journey to the north, welcome them to Yorkshire, and escort them through the county. The town flourished in the coaching days: it has a magnificent wide street, fine old inns, but it never adapted itself to the modern conditions. Scarcely a house has been added to the town during sixty years. Nevertheless Bawtry struggled

gamely on as a Head Post Office on the strength mainly of its former importance, and possibly because of a sentimental objection at headquarters to deal hardly with a town distinguished in Post Office history. But facts had to be faced, and in the Post Office Circular of the 13th March 1900, sentence was pronounced in these cold words: "On and from the 15th March Bawtry will be reduced to the rank of a railway sub-office under Doncaster." "The calamity of railways" had been Bawtry's misfortune, and there was something distinctly cruel in her new designation.

But almost everywhere in Great Britain the story is quite different: new post offices have to be created, old post offices have to be enlarged, and the importance of the postmaster increases. It is his own fault if he does not take a high position in the business circles of the town which he serves.

The postmaster is in all matters of discipline given wide powers, but in questions relating to the business of his office, he has to be guided largely by rules and regulations and by instructions from headquarters. The reason for this is obvious, because in a big Department like the Post Office the first requirement is uniformity of practice, and it would never do for one way of dealing with a matter to be in force at Bristol, another at Liverpool, and yet another at London. But it is the same in the Post Office as in all other big undertakings; everything depends upon the quality of the man who holds the position, and the Head Office in London retains the right to control his actions. One man can be trusted with responsibilities, another requires leading strings, and the machinery of the Department is flexible enough to deal with both men according to their needs.

I repeat myself when I draw attention to the close relationship which exists between the public and the

Post Office. Indeed the story of the Post Office can best be told sometimes by letting the public speak for themselves. A large number of folk have probably very confused ideas of what the regular duties of a postmaster consist, but they know he is approachable: news and correspondence go through his hands, and in their eyes he has taken all knowledge for his province. In no other way can I explain the extraordinary applications for help and information which are constantly received by postmasters.

If a man wishes to arrange for his marriage to take place he applies without hesitation to the clergyman of the parish or to the registrar of the district, but if he wants to know of a lady whom he can marry, he more frequently consults the postmaster. The following is not by any means an exceptional application of this kind:—

"DEAR SIR,—Enclosed you will please find a letter which I would like for you to give some young lady or gent—lady preferred—who you think would like a correspondent in this country. Will correspond on topics of general interest."

We all recognise this as an ingenious beginning of a romance; in its earliest and most artful phase it is even comparatively indifferent to sex.

A good postmaster must of course be domesticated and know the comforts of home. A lady wrote to the postmaster of Goole in these terms: "Not knowing of a good Registry Office for maids in Goole, I am writing to ask you whether you happen to know of a good cook general who is wanting a situation. I am wanting a thoroughly respectable trustworthy girl, age about twenty-four years; must be able to do plain cooking well and be clean in work and person, good at getting up in the morning, and small amount of washing done at home, such as house cloths and servants' underlinen;

other things go to a laundress, including caps and print dresses."

A postmaster is allowed wide discretion in replying to such letters, and the answer to this correspondent was that the postmaster had been for years in search himself of a woman of the age of twenty-four who could do plain cooking, get up in the morning, and not object to "small amount of washing done at home," and when he had found her he claimed the right to the first refusal.

The postmasters at seaside resorts are constantly appealed to by intending visitors, not on the postal facilities of the various places, but on other matters which are presumed to come under the observation of the Post Office. For instance: "Miss P. would feel much obliged if the postmaster would kindly inform her if dogs have still to be muzzled at Eastbourne, and whether the order is likely to be taken off soon. Also if the band plays regularly once or twice a day on the parade."

A gentleman entered a seaside post office and demanded to see the postmaster. He then asked this unoffending individual if he could cash a cheque for £10, tell him the best hotel in the place, and direct him to the nearest hairdresser.

Another postmaster, who by the way was a churchwarden and a reader of the *Daily News*, received this letter from a total stranger:—

"The Postmaster,—Sir, will you kindly send one of your selections for the Grand National as a trial, and if satisfactory I will pay you."

It is difficult to understand what was in the writer's mind when he sought this information at the Post Office.

Other inquiries stick closely to Post Office business, but are perhaps even more unreasonable.

The Head Postmaster

"TO THE POSTMASTER OF HERTFORD

"DEAR SIR,—I am a boy fourteen years old, and I live in a small town in New Jersey on the Delawar river. My father is a horse doctor, and has practised medicine for several years. Several boys of the place have been saving old cancelled stamps to see how many they could get of different kinds, and I thought I could save them too. But as I have just commenced I have not many different kinds, when it came into my head to send to England, as I knew they spoke the same language, so I got my geography and selected your place on the map. Now I would like you to get me all the different kinds of stamps you can. I would have put in postage for you to return your letter, but your stamps are different, and I know it will be useless, but I will send you American stamps or any favour you may ask. Hoping you will regard my letter as a true one.

"I remain to be your friend as soon as possible. Please let me know to the best of your knowledge whether Wales, Scotland, and Ireland use the same kind of stamp. Hope we may meet some time before we die."

Our cousins in America are constantly appealing to postmasters for information.

The postmaster of Campbeltown received this letter:—

"DEAR SIR,—In the month of August 1774 the heroine Flora Macdonald sailed from your village in the ship *Balliol* for America. Can you and will you be kind enough to answer the following questions? What day in August did she sail? How many emigrants with her? How did she come from Skye to Campbeltown? What day did she land in America? Was it on Cape Fear? What was the name of the war-vessel in which she returned to Scotland? What year? Where

did she land? What was the date of Kingsborough's return?

"I beg to say I am writing a history of the Highlanders in America, in which I shall attempt an extended sketch of Flora in this country."

But even when correspondents write on Post Office business they are almost as hopeless. The postmaster of Enniskillen received this communication: "I wonder if you will be so kind as to address and mail a letter to me for a party I wish to reach and have forgotten their address and even their name." All that the man knew about "the party" was that she lived with an aunt and was engaged to be married. It was impossible, at least in Enniskillen, to locate a lady with so conventional a record.

Questions of this kind are much easier: "I am taking the liberty of writing to ask if you will kindly refer me to some good responsible forage merchants, fruit salesmen or commission agents, greengrocers, &c., as I am desirous of ascertaining information relative to turnips (principally), potatoes and apples, and oblige—Your's, &c."

The postmaster of Southsea saw a week's work before him if he attempted to answer this letter:—

"DEAR SIR,—Please send me addresses of furnished apartments and say terms per week for one sitting-room and three bed-rooms. Also send me a cheap guide to Southsea, giving a plan of the streets, &c. What is the area and width of the marine lake? Are there good rowing boats with sliding seats and outriggers on the lake and is there a good rowing club? If so, give address of the club secretary. Can good bicycles be hired? Is there a good covered riding school for horse-riding? If so, give name and address and terms for

riding lessons. Can first-class saddle horses be hired? If so, say the usual terms per hour and give the names and addresses of the best livery stables. Is the beach sand or shingle? and is there good sea-bathing? Is there a school where type-writing and shorthand is taught, and can good male or female clerks be obtained who are first-class type-writers? What salary per week do they usually get? Can electric baths be obtained? What is the usual charge? Is the winter and spring very mild, and is Southsea recommended by the doctors? Do you have much snow or wind in winter and spring? Is there a good gymnasium? Please give an address. Reply by letter. No post cards, please. F. N.

"*P.S.*—Generally speaking, are people satisfied with Southsea when they come?"

It is refreshing, after reading this exhaustive examination paper, to come across a simple and courteous demand from a Greenock sportsman to the postmaster of Dunfermline:—

"GRINOCK.

"KIND SIR,—Will you be so kind too let me no the date of Dunfermalane raises is and you will oblige me.

"E. N."

Or even an honest inquiry such as this, of the postmaster of Weston-super-Mare:—

"Is there an opening hear for a practical tripe and cow-heel dresser, and to cater for the public generally in reasonable price dinners? Should want a place for poultry and piggeries outside the town."

Piggeries *outside* the town are to be encouraged, and we hope the postmaster did not throw cold water on the enterprise.

These letters sufficiently illustrate the view which is

often taken of the uses of a postmaster. And yet there is reason in the attitude of some of these correspondents. The need is evidently felt for a public inquiry agent in every town who will supply local information. Many seaside and inland resorts for visitors have now an officer who is advertised to deal with inquiries; but in hundreds of places the man or woman who seeks information can think of nobody to ask except the postmaster. It is a tribute to the way that the Post Office links itself up with the lives of the people, and nobody but a very churlish postmaster would do other than his best to help his correspondents. Still the public ought clearly to understand that such services are not included in a postmaster's duties, and the inquiries might as reasonably be addressed to the Chief of the Fire Brigade or the Lord-Lieutenant of the county. But perhaps these gentlemen already receive their share of miscellaneous attention.

There are people who think that in a huge undertaking like the Post Office, which works largely by routine, personalities don't count for much. There are others who think that by minute organisation the success of a system can be guaranteed. The human factor, however, still has to be reckoned with, and the city or town is fortunate which has a wise and sensible postmaster. It has been said that "the most depressing thing in the world is a dull person administering faithfully an elaborate system; and one of the most inspiring sights is an original man making the best of an imperfect system." The Head Postmasters of the General Post Office include both kinds of men, and sometimes when we are blaming the system it is the man who is at fault. And when we sometimes blame the man he is really doing his best with the system.

CHAPTER XXI

THE VILLAGE POST OFFICE

ALL post offices other than a Head Office are called sub-offices. The definition embraces busy town offices as well as the village post office. The sub-office is usually managed by a man or woman who has other visible means of support. In the vast majority of cases the sub-office is a shop. And comprising as the ranks of sub-postmasters do all sorts and conditions of men, it is not surprising if we find more variety among this class of official than among the Head Postmasters. The Head Postmaster is a Civil Servant; he has a tradition to keep up, and he looks at official matters with a sort of professional eye. The sub-postmaster, on the other hand, has, as it were, a foot in both worlds, the commercial and the official, and he comes to his duties with the training not of the Civil Servant but of the local tradesman. I sometimes think that it is a good thing for the Post Office service that so many of its servants should have this double interest; they are in close touch with the public, they know its peculiarities across the counter, and they are less likely to be strangled by red tape. The sub-postmaster is often, of course, a highly educated man, and can take a high place among any society of business men in his district; on the other hand, in a small district or village he may be a man of slight education who is only a degree above the working classes. A sub-postmaster is often very human and unsophisticated; he is not trained by the Civil

Service Commissioners to write reports in proper official style, and he often shocks the staid officials at headquarters by the directness of his style. And considering the stock from which sub-postmasters are often drawn, it is sometimes astonishing how well the work of the Department is performed. For most of the duties proper to a Head Office belong also to a sub-office. The responsibility is perhaps less, but the sub-postmaster has frequently to be efficient in all classes of Post Office work, to be an accountant, experienced in banking business, and to know a good deal about telegraphy.

We are growing accustomed to the fact that any letter we write to the remotest hamlet in the Kingdom is certain to be delivered at the earliest possible moment; but it is only within a comparatively late period that this has actually happened. Up to 1764 the Post Office carried letters to post towns only, but did not undertake to deliver them at the homes of the addressees, and in London only was there a local post. This was the famous Penny Post, originally founded by Dockwra in 1680, and soon afterwards taken over by the Crown. In 1764 authority was given for the establishment of this Penny Post within the limits of any city or town, and thirty years later it was provided that any Penny Post might be extended beyond the former limit of ten miles from the town in which it was set up. But such posts were in fact only set up in about half-a-dozen of the largest towns in the Kingdom, and at that time neither benefited nor were intended to benefit the rural districts.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century there were no rural or village posts. Letters were conveyed by post to towns of any considerable size, and were fetched from these places by arrangement on behalf of the people living in the surrounding villages. Probably a

village generally employed its own messenger, paying him in some cases a fixed sum as wages, and in others a penny or more on every letter carried. Sometimes a pauper was employed for this work. Wealthy people made their own arrangements. In 1801 the Post Office made efforts to reach the villages, but right down to 1840 the service was fitful and irregular, and was not uniform. The Government of Sir Robert Peel in 1843 decided that the principle on which rural posts should be established should be based simply upon the number of letters for each locality. "All places, the letters for which exceed 100 a week, should be deemed entitled to the privilege of a receiving office and a free daily delivery of their letters." In 1850 this rule was still further simplified, and the rule was now that a post should be established when it would pay its way. Modifications of even this rule took place in successive years, and the network of rural posts extended so much that in 1862 the proportion of letters delivered to the addressees was estimated to reach 94 per cent. In 1871 the Postmaster-General was able to announce that he hoped "the time is not distant when a free delivery at least two or three times a week will be provided for every house in the country, however remote." But it was twenty years before this pious hope began to be fulfilled. At the end of 1892 it was estimated that there were still about 32,000,000 letters a year not delivered by the Post Office. Nearly 8,000,000 letters were in the next year brought into free delivery, and the work of extension went on gradually until the day of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in 1897, when it was announced that a regular delivery of letters would be given to every house in the Kingdom. We can now scarcely understand any other state of things to be endurable for a day.

The rural sub-postmaster has had enormously in-

creased duties thrown upon him in recent years, and it is possible that his pay has not kept pace with his responsibility. The Department naturally takes advantage of the fact that the work of the Post Office is a valuable addition to any business, and that a man is provided with a big advertisement for his particular trade when he is given the Post Office business. At any rate, there is usually a demand in every place for the privilege of running the Post Office. Still, the sub-postmaster is human, and he does not always admit the justice of this kind of indirect payment. Towards the end of 1907, many sub-postmasters were eagerly looking out for the Report of the Parliamentary Committee on their condition. Something good was expected. In January 1908, a new book of Rules for sub-postmasters was issued and distributed, and one sub-postmaster in a remote country district came to the conclusion that the book was the long-looked-for Report, and fresh from great disappointment, and, as will be seen, breathless with indignation, he wrote to his Head Postmaster as follows: at the end of his letter he placed his first full stop.

"Sir I have read the new book of rules all through I see by it that sub postmasters has gained nothing but lost all the privileges they had the cannot speak of any thing the cannot speak for a member of parlment county counceler or anything the cannot sell anything that does not belong to the Post Office the cannot take an agency from any one the belive that himself and his place all belongs to them the expect him to look after Postboys mail car bad coin watch everything night and day that belongs to the Post Office I have to keep the office opened for twelve hours every day do everything attend to every one no one person fit to do this or do what the Book expects them to do we have not sunday

to ourselves we must stay till four o'clock in the evening to prepare the bag for the mail car we get no allowance for holidays one of us must stop at home from church on Sunday on our turn to attend for the car bees nearly always late on sunday and gets no money for it I do not see how the expects us to do it for nine pence a day or how can the expect a man to live on it would be a fine thing for one to be a postman I would have more pay and clothes when my three hours was over I could go where I liked and had sunday to myself there is no one under the goverment so bad paid as country sub offices and still we have more to do than any other one for we have to tie parsels rite the direction on letters and parsels for most of the people for the do not no how last year I had to sit up till 11 o clock at night riting after the 5 35 car came I had 34 regestered letters to compair with the list and check them put my Initels after every one of them fill 34 receats 34 counterfoils so the do not look to whet we have to do to prepare everything for the Postmen next morning we have to handle letters from every one take their money no matter what desease or sickness is in there house still we are not allowed a doctor if anything happens we are not alowed anything it is nearly a shame to be a country sub postmaster if the expect to do work they should pay us I have to pay a man 12 shillings a week for 6 days and he will oneley work 9 hours for me in summer and about 5 in Winter so I see that nothing is left us but to resign as it will pay no one we are not alowed to show our greevances in the press to the publick or through a member of parliment we must leave all to them no less than a pound a week would Pay to keep up to the new rules Keep marking time for Postmen marking and dating everything in the new book they should give us fair Play we waited with patience thinking

the Commission would do something for us but it made us worse it must be there was no one to give evedence for us we have pens ink cealing wax too I think I have rote some of our Grievence to you as you are onely one left to us to write to your obedient servant."

Here we have the duties and disabilities of a rural sub-postmaster all described picturesquely in his own words, and the only defence we can offer for the authorities is that the man has not resigned, and would regard it as the greatest injustice of all if he were relieved of his duties.

Yet sub-postmasters do deserve our sympathies. They endure much from an irritable and impatient public. Occasionally, the suffering becomes articulate. "I beg," says a sub-postmaster, "to report that the man called at the office to-day. I handed him the book, and complied with your instructions. *I hope I shall never see him again.*" We can almost imagine the painful scene at the counter.

We are often ready enough to complain of the incivility and indifference of the man or woman at the post office, but we don't realise how trying we are to the much-harassed officials. A sub-postmaster was asked to explain why he accepted irregularly a deposit in an account which had already exceeded the limit. His reply showed that at least red-tape methods do not prevail at his office, even though moral courage may be lacking in the postmaster. "In order to avoid unpleasantness which appeared to be imminent, I accepted the deposit."

Sometimes so involved and difficult is the work put upon a slow-minded country sub-postmaster, that it is often a case of the blind leading the blind. A shaggy and a shambling man, obviously an agriculturist, entered

a rural post office. He knew all about crops, and was firmly convinced that every sort of weather was bad for them. But he was weak in finance. However, it had come to his ears that it would be a sound scheme to invest money in the local post office. Therefore he entered the curious building—half grocer's shop, half village club, and perfumed with cheddar—that served as a post office. The sub-postmaster explained the system to the man.

"But, mister, can I withdraw my money whenever I want to?"

"Of course you can, fat'ead," was the answer. "You can drore it ter-morrer . . . if you give a fortnight's notice."

The habit of talking to the people in their own idioms is to be commended. In rural districts it inspires more confidence, and is better understood than official regulations.

The sub-office is frequently an hereditary institution. It has been in the same family for generations. There is a sub-office at Churchill near Enniskillen, in Ireland, which has passed down in direct succession from father to son since the year 1750. In 1882 the salary was £3 a year, but the Postmaster-General specially increased the amount to £12 in consideration of the lengthened period in which the office had been held by members of the family.

The Post Office in Ireland in old days was served light-heartedly compared with these strenuous times. I have read in an old newspaper of 1821 how the postmaster of Lismore, aged ninety-seven, and almost old enough to know better, won a wager. He travelled to Fermoy in a Dungarvan oyster tub, drawn by a pig, a badger, two cats, a goose, and a hedgehog, with a red nightcap on his head, a pig-driver's whip in one hand,

and a cow's horn for musical purposes in the other. In these days he would have had to furnish a written explanation to the Secretary. Possibly it would have been similar to that furnished by a modern sub-postmaster, who had been accused of certain vagaries in the performance of his duties: "I know I am not Perfect by a Long Way, but it does not make it any Better. I was not Drunk because I hadd no Bear." The explanation of another respecting the misconduct of one of his subordinates was: "As Mr. —— is generally a careful officer, and was probably not on duty at the time the error was made, he has been let off with a caution."

The Post Office has employed women in its service since the earliest times. The sub-postmistress of the village is often a most useful officer. She sometimes takes her duties more seriously than the man; she likes the opportunity of managing things which the office gives her: the sense of being "On his Majesty's Service" helps her to magnify her office. And she is usually quite refreshingly free from officialism. One of their number was asked in an official memorandum to state why she had not yet furnished an explanation of an irregularity a few weeks back, and she replied: "I was too angry with myself to do anything." What need was there of an official caution in face of such sincere repentance!

But the sub-postmistress is often extremely strong-minded and masterful, especially if she is of mature years, and it is extremely difficult for either her chiefs or the public to move her in any course she has adopted. The Department was informed by one lady that she was about to be married, and when she was asked the usual questions whether she would remain the housekeeper, she replied magnificently: "I have made no change. I hold entire dominion over the present post office

premises, otherwise there would be no marriage." The proposal scene in this case must have been shorn of a good deal of the romance one usually associates with such experiences. Sometimes the sub-postmistress marries one of her male assistants, and she is in the proud position of being able to extract written explanations from, and to administer cautions to, her husband. And yet there have been instances where the public service did not suffer by this arrangement, nor was the home life apparently put much out of gear. Sometimes the sub-postmaster marries a female assistant, and I read in a service paper this touching confession of one of the inconveniences arising from such an act: "My wife is also my first assistant, and during the first three years of our married life we obtained our holidays together. Last year, however, exception was taken to this by the Surveyor, who stated my wife ought to take charge during my absence on annual leave. I appealed to the Secretary, *and the decision went against me.*" I think "the decision went against *me*" is a very pretty touch.

The sub-postmistress is of course often one of the village folk herself, and she is frequently exposed to gossip and unworthy suspicions. The lady who had charge of a certain village post office was strongly suspected of tampering with parcels entrusted to her care. If anything went wrong with them in any part of the Kingdom she was to blame. One day a rosy-cheeked youngster, dressed in his best clothes, entered the post office and carefully laid a huge slice of iced cake on the counter.

"With my sister the bride's compliments, and will you please eat as much as you can."

The sub-postmistress smiled delightedly. "How very kind of the bride to remember me. Did she know of my weakness for wedding-cake?"

"She did," answered the youngster coolly, "and she thought she'd send yer a bit of it this afternoon, just to take the edge off yer appetite before she posted boxes to her friends."

Rightly or wrongly the rural post office is supposed to know all the secrets and scandals of the neighbourhood. When private information leaks out, it is usually the post office which is suspected. And especially is this the case when there are women at the post office. Sometimes the interest in the affairs of the village is quite open. A woman enters a rural post office.

"Anything for me?" she asks.

Rural Postmaster. I don't see nothen'.

Woman. I was expectin' a letter or postcard from Aunt Spriggs tellin' when she was comin'.

Rural Postmaster (*calling to his wife*). Did you see a postcard from Mrs. Hayfork's aunt, Sally?

His Wife. Yes; she's comin' on Thursday.

In the *Christian World* of the 20th September 1901 there appeared an excellent description of the village post office in an article entitled "The Scottish Coast Village." "The real centre of the world for us is the village post office. It does everything except the one thing which is supposed to be the duty of a post office—distribute the letters. That is done from a neighbouring village by a five-mile-an-hour-easy postman, who when he has delivered our letters and returned to his own office a mile and a half away has still a thirteen-mile tramp amongst the scattered farms. Summer and winter, through snow and mud, in burning heat or freezing cold, he fulfils his daily task, and has never missed a mail nor caught a cold.

"But if our post office does not distribute the letters it would be difficult to name anything else which it will not do. There the chance tourist leaves his bicycle

and waterproof while he looks round the village and has a dip in the sea; thither turns the inquirer after lost property or the fine weather which will not come; groceries, draperies, stationery, tobacco, all are found among its exhaustible stores; anything will be provided within reasonable time, and 'prescriptions are carefully made up' at forty-eight hours' notice from the country town twelve miles away. The postmaster and shopkeeper is one of those willing, handy men, often found in such positions, who are the acting representatives of Providence to the helpless visitor. He will take any amount of trouble for you; never loses his temper amid the thousand-and-one inquiries which assail him all the day long; and gives up part of his Sabbath rest—well earned—to leading the singing of the village choir. This he does with an accompaniment of the foot which ensures excellent time, though in itself a little disconcerting."

There are hundreds of village post offices which would answer to this description; we all go straight to the post office when in a strange place, if we are in the slightest difficulty. The post office is there "On his Majesty's Service" to get us out of trouble. Unhappy is the village without a post office. Yet there is, or was until recently, a village on the edge of the Norfolk marshlands where there was no doctor for seven miles, no telegraph office for delivery within five miles, and where, until a very late date, the only village post-box was a slit in a hollow elm against the churchyard. In such villages as this, the news of the world comes through the postman. If he has no letter to deliver in the place, the news as well as he stops away.

Writing in 1897, the author of the delightful *Pages from a Private Diary* spoke of the effect of the increase of postal facilities on the sluggish-minded country-folk.

The Village Post Office

"People who are accustomed to the business-like promptitude of the young men and maidens in town offices have little idea of the casual way in which things are managed with us. A month or two since, having to register a letter containing a small present for the golden wedding of an old friend which had reached me too late for our own despatch, I drove to a village on the railway where the mails leave a few hours later. The following dialogue ensued :—

"*Postmaster.* Do you know how old I am ?

"*I.* No ; are you seventy-five ?

"*Postmaster.* Seventy-five ! I'm as old as Mr. Gladstone. Don't look it, don't I ? No, I mayn't look it, but I am. I've been postmaster here for fifty years or more. Yes, I ain't so young as I have-a-been. Good-day, sir.

"*I.* But I want a letter registered.

"*Postmaster.* Registered ! Well, I hardly know how. You see, I'm an old man now. Oh yes ! I've registered 'em in my day, but I don't somehow like the responsibility. No, I don't feel as if at my age I ought to take the responsibility. You see I've been postmaster here man and boy for . . .

"In the end I had to take the letter home again."

There is one thing which you will rarely obtain in a rural post office, and that is incivility. This as a rule is associated with "the business-like promptitude of the young men and maidens in town offices," and the country postmaster's manners are often superior to his intelligence.

The smaller the place, the more limited, of course, is the field of selection by the authorities. Let me give one or two specimens of the applications for appointment which are received.

"DEAR SIR,—I see you have two vacancies for two sub-postmasters, and I feel I should very much like to

become one. Would you kindly let me know where they are situated and what money is allowed. I have money and I have brains, and I pride myself as being straightforward, honest, and true, with purity of soul, simplicity of mind, and honesty of purpose."

This man had, no doubt, painted from his own model a picture of the ideal country postmaster as conceived by the poet and the literary man who, writing in Fleet Street, dream of the sanctifying influence of the country-side. But the inhuman Department declined to take the man at his own valuation, and his qualifications were not considered sufficient.

Here is another :—

"DEAR SIR,—I rite to aplie for the applacation for the Post Office seeing the Bill out an I have sold the stampes now as good five years now an I should be please to take the Office up from yours truly——"

I now give an application from a woman who was conscious of her educational failings but suggested a way by which they could be circumvented :—

"SIR,—I hear that E—— T—— is done with the care of the Post Office and I ofer myself as a candate for the ofice through the Rev.—— i am a widow and as a shop and I have a grand daughter stoping with me a good scholar.

"I remain &c."

This is an application which would be seriously considered by the Department: the grand-daughter would be the stand-by of the post office.

It is often asked, Why does not the Post Office demand Civil Service certificates from all its officers? The question, of course, is simply one of expense. The employment of persons with a higher standard of education would mean a higher rate of payment, and this

would lessen the annual contribution which the Post Office makes to the Treasury. There can be little doubt, however, that the multifarious duties which are now thrown on the village post office are a severe strain on the uneducated official, and he causes an infinitude of trouble at the Head Office, which has to rectify his mistakes. This is the sort of thing which frequently occurs. A sub-postmaster was asked why he accepted the signature of a certain Nurse Jones as witness to an important document. His instructions were that the document must be signed in the presence of a commissioner for oaths or a notary public. He replied: "Nurse Jones is one of a body of nurses who is *well known* in the neighbourhood. Nurse Jones was therefore regarded as a notary public."

But even with the drawback of possessing so many agents who belong to the half-educated and quarter-educated classes, the Post Office gets a good deal out of its country officers. Many possess plenty of shrewdness and native intelligence, and business is got through with or without the help of the regulations. They are sometimes not to be side-tracked even by a railway company. There was at a certain date some irregularity in the mail service in the Romney Marsh district. The local official explained "that on Friday last the mails were only got off by running after the train, and to-day in the same manner. On Saturday we failed to catch up the train." Evidently the South-Eastern and Chatham Railway were beginning to accelerate their train service.

There remains to be considered the village post office itself, and post office architecture is usually a rather painful subject. The modern standard post office is obviously built for utility, and little regard is paid to what fits in with the spirit of the place. But there are hundreds of village post offices all over the United King-

dom which are the delight of the artist and the tourist. Just as a hymn or a psalm seems to contain an added beauty because of the feeling in the singer that it has perhaps brought joy and consolation to men and women through the centuries, so the little gabled cottage or shop covered with ivy appeals to us not only through its beauty but through its long connection with the joys and sorrows of the village. Those of us who have visited Tintagel know the cottage called the "old post office." It is of the fourteenth century, small but commodious; it has a fireplace which is so constructed that the inhabitants could sit round the fire without being betrayed by the light to passers-by. It is fitted up with conveniences for the use of smugglers. And over all stretch great roof timbers black with the smoke of ages. That, however, is a disused post office; there are beautiful offices still to be found, especially in our southern villages, and every lover of the country-side demands of the Post Office authorities that the standard pattern should be confined to the suburbs and the new townships. We will willingly put up with a village post-master who indulges in euphonious spelling if they leave us our pretty ivy-clad post office full of associations which bind it to the village.

CHAPTER XXII

THE POSTMAN

IT is easy to be eloquent on the subject of the postman. He is the outward and visible sign to us all of the postal service. He brings it to our doors. He has persisted, while other officials and other methods have passed away to make room for modern improvements. Post-boys, mail coaches, and mail trains have in turn carried our letters across country at increasing rates of speed, but the last stage, viz. the actual delivery of the letter, is still left to the postman. And I suppose his average rate of speed is a very little higher than it was two hundred years ago.

There have been, of course, changes in his methods and in his costume: Penny Post simplified his duties while it increased enormously the volume of his work. The town postman has perhaps changed more than his rural brothers. The idea of a uniform for the Service is comparatively modern, and in the old days there was great variety in the postman's costume. He wore in town districts a top hat, and he rang a bell as he passed down the streets. In certain towns not only was there the usual delivery but selected postmen collected letters for despatch. "The bell rings for my letter, and makes me lose the happiness of fancying I am talking with my dear, to whom I am sincerely, ever your most affectionate wife." So wrote, in January 1701, Lady Mary Coke to her husband, Thomas Coke, afterwards Vice-Chancellor, and there is little doubt she was referring to this custom.

A century later the custom was in full vigour in London, and in *The Picture of London for* 1805 appears the following statement: "Houses or boxes for receiving letters before four o'clock at the west end of the town and five o'clock in the City are open in every part of the metropolis: after that hour bellmen collect the letters during another hour, receiving a fee of one penny for each letter."

The ringing of the bells was only abolished as late as 1846 in London, but it lingered on in other places much later: in Leamington there was a Post Office bellman as late as 1866. Pillar boxes and frequent collections have been the death of the bellman.

The general title "postman" covers a number of separate positions, varying in importance and salary. There are London postmen, provincial town postmen, sub-office postmen, rural postmen, and auxiliary postmen. And these different ranks are again divided into established and unestablished officers. An established officer holds a permanent situation, and devotes the whole of his time to the Post Office service: he has an annual holiday, and receives a pension when he retires from the Service.

The unestablished positions are not permanent, and do not carry pensions with them. Auxiliary postmen do not give up their whole time to the Service, but are supposed to pursue another trade or occupation. These men are generally employed for two or three hours in the morning to assist the established postman with the first delivery, which is always the heaviest. A postmaster reported on one of these men as follows:—

"Jones received notice that his services would not be required after the 20th August. On the 16th he came on duty at the usual hour. After about an hour's work had been done he tossed up a penny to decide whether he

should stop or not; as he at once left duty and did not return, it is presumed that the spin of the coin was against further work."

A rural postman's duties are certainly more varied and often more responsible than those of his town brother. His average walk is supposed to be about 16 miles a day, with a maximum of 18. He is often regarded as a "walking post office" in remote country districts: he sells stamps, receives letters for posting, takes even registered letters, and in some cases sells postal orders. The bell has been abolished in town districts, but the rural postman still blows his horn or whistle in villages where he collects or delivers letters.

It is obvious that with this huge body of men, who have great responsibility thrown upon them, something approaching to the discipline of an army has to be preserved. Let me mention a few of the marching orders of the town postman. A postman, when he has once started on his walk, must not go to his own house or to any other except to deliver a letter; he must not smoke on duty; he must not deliver letters to owners in the streets, but only at the houses to which they are addressed; he must not put letters under doors even if asked to do so; he must not take letters from the public for registration; he must carry no other missives than those that have been regularly posted; he must not act as a newsagent; must not borrow money from persons on his walk; he must not agitate or help in any agitation for a discontinuance of Sunday work; and he must not in any way be connected with a public-house or inn.

There are all sorts and conditions of men employed as postmen, and among them are to be found men of education and culture. I have known several such men, who could talk on any subject, and had read



THE POSTMAN'S BELL.

In the eighteenth and the early years of the nineteenth century the town postman carried a bell, which he rang vigorously to give notice of his approach.

widely. I asked one postman how he spent his annual holiday, and I think I suggested to him that he probably lay on the beach all day resting his tired limbs. "Good gracious, no!" he replied; "I go on a walking tour. I have done the Lakes, Wales, and Scotland. You see, sir, it's really a change of movement for me, for we postmen don't walk, we shuffle." And this is perhaps the reason why the postman fails to impress us as an individual. In Mr. H. J. Barker's delightful book, *The Comic Side of School Life*, there is an amusing essay entitled *The Postman*, supposed to have been written by a little boy. Perhaps if all writers were to follow his example, and record what they have actually observed, rather than what has been communicated to them second hand, they would be equally entertaining.

"Nobody could be happy in the world except for the useful gentleman what we call a postman. For how would you no whether those arnts and uncles of yours who live right acrost the fields and rivers was dead if the gentleman didnt bring a henvelop with black all round? You would think they are still alive and you'd keep on all writing to them. Thet is why postmen are allis little thin men without beards, cuz they have to keep on walking quick all day. They are not dressed up so fine as soldiers cuz they havent to go and fight acrost the sea. You never see postmen fight: not even with their fists, cuz they havent got no time with all those letters to take round. I dont think postmen dare even fight boys cuz when me and some more boys was a looking at a postman unlocking a pillar box and one of the boys pushed his head in the hole and we all run away: he wouldnt even run after us but only told a polleceman when he came round the corner and when he came away from the polleceman he was frightened of walking

our way past us but jumped on a tramway and shammed not to see us. Postmen allis knocks so as to waken babies and then they tries to look as if they didnt no as baby was behind the door. If the postman doesnt bring your letters you can summons him, thats why they're so frightened. Two or three postmen come together without letters at Christmas and they ask your mothers for a Christmas box. My mother gave them a penny to share amongst them, but some didnt. Many boys become postmen cuz they think it is a good trade. I dont think they get good dinners same as men who hasnt to dress up. My father has a lot of meat and bread and he keeps on a eatin. Postmen allis black their boots cuz they are frightened of being summonsed. They are very frightened men and wont hurt you whatever you do. Never be cruel to them for they have to take care of their clothes more than you and are not so big as they would like. I once see a postman not dressed up an he was smoking a pipe and he put it away when he seed me and the other boys. But we seed him though and some of the boys called out after him 'You'll go and get summoned for smoking yer fathers pipe yer will,' but he wouldnt turn round, and he puffed the terbacca out again as he got further on. This is all I know about postmen except they are very clean men most any time you like to look."

We understand exactly how the boy formed his delightful impressions, and it is curious that in an article in the *Mirror* of the 1st June 1839 I have found many of the ideas anticipated. "The letter carrier himself may be said to be deficient of any very striking characteristic, any peculiar recommendation as a national portrait; he himself is indeed a commonplace; he is only for the time being elevated by our hopes and fears. . . . He literally walks through life, absolutely knocks through a

whole existence transacting small Government bargains, with no time to sit or stand or think of the iniquities, real or imaginary, of his political masters. We never heard of a postman being concerned in a conspiracy. If a postman start in life with a dapper figure shall he not be slim and elegant to the last? Is he not certain of carrying to the grave his original greyhound outline? Gout shuns him, corpulency visits him not, while exercise crowns him with its gifts."

Some of this, however, does not apply to the modern postman; he has learnt the art of combination, and the Postmen's Union can scarcely be called an ineffective organisation. And, of course, in hundreds of cases the charge of personal ineffectiveness is ludicrously false. The opportunities of their calling for brave and effective action in the streets and wayside roads on behalf of their fellow-creatures are constantly being taken advantage of by postmen, and the Royal Humane Society's medals are held by quite a number of these men. And Post Office history is full of stories of the way they stood by the mail to the last moment in crises of difficulty and danger. The impression of personal ineffectiveness is one that cannot be justified logically; but it persists, just as the reproach of femininity is still associated with the clergy. Here is a case where the rural postman scored. Motorists do not always get their own way on country roads. A mail cart was suddenly confronted with a large motor on a very narrow road in the north-west of Scotland. The postman was told in peremptory tones to shift on to the heather. He refused to budge. Language which appears to be common to the driver in all classes of society followed from the motor gentleman. But the mail-man merely remarked with dignity: "Every minute you detain me, you are detaining his Majesty's mails. You must make way for me." The result was

the car had to back a considerable distance, and the mail-man drove past triumphant. And even the motor gentleman realised the absurdity of reporting the matter to the Postmaster-General. He merely continued to use strong language.

Moreover, those who have to deal with the postman find him delightfully human. The Magna Charta of the Postal Service is the written explanation. Before you can be punished for any offence you are given the opportunity to defend yourself on paper. It is the privilege of all ranks, from the highest to the lowest; but, of course, the written explanation of the principal clerk is a different production from that signed by the postman. The difference is often chiefly in style and grammar, and the credit of the production as a real explanation of the facts must often be given to the postman, rather than to the high official, when he explains any action. All explanations are modelled on the same plan: you state the facts, you explain your conduct, and you express regret. The special feature of the postman's explanation is that there is nothing studied about the composition.

A postman was asked "to furnish a written explanation for frequently departing from the direct and proper route to the starting-point of your delivery in order to call in at your home." The reply of the postman should appeal to our hearts: "My reason for the above was for no other purpose than I told the clerk when he questioned me on that point—to let my wife know what time I should be likely to return to breakfast. It must also be understood that I have only been married a few weeks, and is very anxious to return to my wife where others of longer experience might be glad to keep away. I also told the clerk I would in future turn to the left instead of the right. Remaining, your obedient servant."

The Postman

It seems that the Head Postmaster of the district recommended to the surveyor not only that the postman should be reprimanded, but that "the local sub-postmistress should be cautioned to keep a better look-out on the movements of the men under her control." This lady had failed to report the irregularities; she had in fact winked at official lapses incidental to the prolonged honeymoon. Like the postman, she probably knew that his was an offence which time would cure.

These written explanations of the postmen bring us to close quarters with human life: they illustrate for us, better than any description could do, the conditions of their life. For instance, "The slight smell of drink which the inspector noticed, was what I and my missus had for our suppers." I am afraid this inclusion of the missus rather justifies some of the schoolboy's strictures on postmen.

A rural postman was asked to explain how it was that he was ten minutes late at a certain point, and he stated that he had been "Reaveling in Nature." Again our sympathies are stirred: we think it hard that the official machine should come down on him because he owned up to the possession of a soul.

More attention is paid to the subject of postmen's uniform than in the days when Mr. Alfred Jingle spoke of it in this contemptuous fashion: "Rather short in the waist, ain't it? Like a general postman's coat—queer coats these—made by contract—no measuring—mysterious dispensation of providence—all the short men get long coats—all the long men short ones." But the question of uniform was long a burning one in postal circles. Official delays were as frequent in these matters as in others. A memorandum faithfully explains how matters stood. It naturally causes irritation when the distributions are so delayed that the winter clothing

does not reach the employés until the cold weather is well-nigh over: the irritation is not allayed when the garments which reach them at the late period are found not to fit; and when months elapse before misfitting garments are exchanged, it is not surprising that the feeling of irritation is merged in one of active discontent. But more eloquent than any official language is a representation made by one of the men themselves. "I was late last night and my close are to thick for this weather; my shirt was running with prasperation last night and they are to much for this weather, it takes all your time to wipe the sweet of my face, and I cannot tell weather I am intit to A summer sute or not, but the things are too hot for this weather and I had to work at Skote and weigh some parcels as there is no men to carry them when the woman is out and that make a difference to me on my round and it is not all pleasure with winter clothing and I am sorry; believe me to be yours truly."

Then there is the extra wear and tear which is sometimes difficult to explain with a limited vocabulary. An auxiliary rural postman was called upon to explain why his uniform was in an unsatisfactory condition. Here is his reply: "Dear Sir all I can say a bout the trousers that i never ad a pare that were so bad before and as for waring my youniform is a thing never do off duty at any time, there is wone thing i have a good meny styles to get over i have had to have the hole of my trousers mended in seat be fore time of the next ishue but this is the worst." If the postman found his difficulty was in getting over the stiles the authorities must have discovered that their difficulty was to get over his arguments.

A postmaster in applying for stores once inquired "whether anything can be done for a cycle postman

who has ridden through the seat of his trousers." An auxiliary appearing in private trousers was taxed with the disappearance of the official pair. He explained that after a shower of rain he had hung them on a fence to dry, and had subsequently found that they had been eaten by cows. Another postman was asked to return his uniform, and he had rather a painful story to relate. "Sir, the postal stores sent for the last light overcoat and cape Saturday last. I am sorry to say that a little axedent occur to the coat in the wintry wett weather; while my Mrs. was drying the coat her tail caught fire and was damage and then I was oblige to cut her three quarters size and find her very useful in the mornings of fine weather." Evidently a resourceful postman.

There are, I believe, 1800 sizes and variants of the ordinary tunics for postmen. The man must have an original shape indeed who cannot be fitted from the stock in hand. A curious physiological fact has been discovered by the clothiers of the Department. The further north one goes the bigger become the heads of his Majesty's postmen. The heads of the Glasgow postmen are the largest in the Kingdom, and knowing this we are not surprised to learn that the *Postman's Gazette*, the able journal devoted to the interests of the postmen, is published in Glasgow and edited by a Glasgow postman. I may also note that the feet of the Glasgow telegraph boys are the largest boys' feet in the Kingdom.

The Post Office service includes nearly 3000 postwomen. They get a rather smart waterproof outfit: official leggings, even shakos are not refused, but most ladies prefer to wear their own hats.

The Russian Postmaster-General recently drew up a regulation that all ladies employed in the Postal Service must wear a feminine edition of the rather smart uniform

which is worn by the male officers. It is described as having "blue piping at the sides and button-holes and metallic badges. The coat used by both sexes will be much the same, except that the ladies' sleeve will be wide and fashionable." The Continent is always in advance of us in the matter of uniform.

The number of postwomen has increased lately, probably on account of the migration of men to the towns. For it is in the more distant and sequestered districts that the postwoman is to be found, and this explains the fact that one remembers so rarely to have come across a lady on her postal round. One of these ladies, Mrs. Elizabeth Dickson, retired in 1908 after having walked 129,392 miles in thirty years. Her walk was between Melrose and Gattonside in Scotland. She had not once been late on duty, and had only been absent on sick leave for fourteen days. She was sixty-eight before she found the daily tramp of 13½ miles too much for her strength.

Another lady, Mrs. Jane Wort of Overton, Hampshire, was left a widow in 1876 with a stepson, when she was forty-six years old, and then took up the duties of postwoman. Her daily round was from 16 to 17 miles a day, and she maintained this for over thirty years. Only twice during these years had she been off duty, both absences being due to sprains to hands and ankles, which were caused by falls in slippery weather when going her rounds.

The records of the postmen are full of similar instances of hard work and long distances covered, and I have mentioned the ladies in particular because they are in the minority, and are presumed to be the weaker sex. It is, however, not everybody who thrives under this regular and exhausting labour. "Well, Mrs. Biggs," said a district visitor to one of her parishioners, "I am sorry



By permission of *Messrs. Martin Pirie.*

A Country Postwoman.

This is a portrait of Jane Wort, a postwoman of Overton, Hampshire. For nineteen years her daily round amounted to from sixteen to seventeen miles a day. When she was over seventy years of age her round was reduced to eight miles a day. For nearly thirty years she had never been off duty.

your husband is poorly: I think a little exercise would do him good." And Mrs. Biggs answered sadly, "I'm afraid it's done him 'arm, mum; he's been a letter carrier now for twenty years."

At a farewell dinner given to Prince Ranjitsinhji in 1908 a letter was read out from Mr. Buckmaster, K.C., in which were related the triumphs of a village postman. He said: "I envy you the pleasure of the evening, and I sincerely wish that it were possible for me to be present. The last time I had the honour of meeting his Highness was at a village cricket match fifteen years ago. The occasion will always be memorable in the annals of country cricket, for he was bowled by the village postman for nineteen runs. He never knew that the postman had been put into careful training for the performance for weeks, and that he had been driven all round his district so as to avoid the exhaustion of his energies by long walking or too long lingering in the hospitable kitchens of the country."

A postman is surely the last occupation we should think of for a lame man, but there have been several instances where a man with crutches has performed his daily duties willingly and excellently. An official sent out to test a man's ability to do his work—the postman walked 17 miles on crutches—found himself quite outpaced by the lame official. A rural postman who had a wooden leg made use of a donkey and cart, but it was found out after his resignation that finding a difficulty in getting in and out of his cart he carried with him a tin bucket full of large stones. These he hurled at the front door when occasion demanded. An original postman's knock. Certainly this was another resourceful postman.

A rural postman of Newport who has recently retired from the Service gave notice of approach in this fashion.

The Postman

He could whistle by the aid of his fingers in such a way as to make himself heard from parish to parish. And he carried an umbrella which it was said would shelter a village population nicely.

Wherever he may be, in northern latitudes, in the tropics, or in the town and country districts of the United Kingdom, the postman carries about with him the proud consciousness that he is "On his Majesty's Service." Everything must give way before him. Even when on occasions the streets of London are blocked to everybody else, to allow a royal procession or a Lord Mayor's Show to pass, the policeman makes room for the postman. These are perhaps the proudest moments of a postman's life, provided always he is indifferent to the doubtful compliments of the London crowd.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE POST OFFICE GUIDE

IT is wonderful how persistent are certain prejudices in the minds of the British public. With vast numbers of people it is an accepted fact that Bradshaw is unintelligible, and a book only for experts in travel. The A B C, with its delightful appeal in the title to the simple-minded, was brought out to meet the needs of such people, but to anybody who has grasped one or two elementary facts concerning our railway system there is no doubt whatever which is the more interesting volume. Bradshaw will trace for you the whole of your journey, the places you pass, the stations you stop at, and the junctions at which you may have to change. Indeed a love of Bradshaw for its own sake often develops in the mind of a man who can travel in imagination, and we have all probably known instances of delightful folk, almost entirely of one sex, who can amuse themselves by the hour over the study of time-tables.

Another accepted prejudice is that the Post Office Guide is obscure and useless for the average citizen. It is rarely seen on a lady's writing-table, though the need for the information it contains is probably felt by her almost every day. She will resort to any expedient to obtain enlightenment about Post Office methods short of consulting the best authority on the matter. With all our vaunted education we hear people still

object that they do not know where to look for what they want, and they seem astonished if you inform them that the book has an index. They object to the size of the volume; they want the information they require to be obtained without the slightest effort: our numerous books of reference are causing us to lose the sense of joy in the mere pursuit of knowledge. A proper Post Office Guide should go in our waistcoat pocket or reticule, and if the Post Office cannot tell us in a small compass what to do it is out of date, and the sooner the institution is managed on modern business lines the better for everybody. That is the sort of criticism we hear of a book which only requires to be known to be appreciated. Besides, there *is* a pocket edition published.

Let me take first this matter of the size of the volume which frightens many people. The book contains nearly 900 pages. But 370 odd of these make up a list of the provincial offices in the United Kingdom, while an additional 100 contain the time-tables of the various mails to and from London. Another 100 pages give directions and time-tables for the London district, and about 150 pages are devoted to time-tables and directories for foreign mails. The printed instructions, therefore, concerning the vast postal, telegraph, telephone, savings bank, money order, and postal order systems are limited to about 150 pages, and there are no advertisements. This last fact, I admit, diminishes its interest to the Bradshaw enthusiast, because part of the charm of his volume is that he can select the hotels where he shall stay on his imaginary journeys. But my point is that by far the larger portion of the book is composed of time-tables and directories which are both useful and interesting, and that, considering the huge mass of business undertaken by the Post Office,

The Post Office Guide

the section devoted to explaining the regulations is small, and expressed clearly and concisely. There was a delightful picture in *Punch* some time ago of two ladies in a shop debating what to purchase. Then one said to the other: "You should try so-and-so; it is so highly spoken of in the advertisements." Now this lady's interest in the Post Office could never be stimulated by the recommendations in the Postal Guide. There is not even a preliminary puff in the shape of a preface. The book, for instance, begins with simply an unadorned statement of the basis of the mail service.

"The prepaid rate of postage is as follows:—

"Not exceeding 4 oz. in weight, 1d.

For every additional 2 oz., ½d."

"Get that into your mind," the Guide seems to say, "and you will find that you have mastered the most useful fact in the whole system." There are, of course, numerous qualifications to this rule arising out of the necessities of the Service. We may admit that there are perhaps too many of these in the Post Office system, and that it might be in the end cheaper for the Department to take more risks, but we can certainly see a good reason for the following:—

"No letter may exceed two feet in length, one foot in width, or one foot in depth."

But there is an exception even to this: the British Government has a way of contracting itself out of its own regulations, and official letters are carefully excluded from the application of this rule. The mere layman feels annoyed at this; he usually pictures the Government as a designing body which is always "on the make," and has certainly not yet arrived at the truth that the State represents him even in small matters connected with Post Office revenue.

The Post Office Guide

Everybody knows a postcard can be sent for a halfpenny, but you will be wrong if you think this is because it is a small thing, and that the Post Office charges are in proportion to the size of an article. Indeed the Guide will tell you plainly that if you reduce the card in size below 4 by $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches it will be treated as a letter. This does not seem logical to many plain Britons, who think that half a postcard ought naturally to be a farthing. They don't appreciate the difficulties arising out of the carriage of diminutive articles.

The Halfpenny Packet Post requires careful consideration before we venture to experiment with its privileges. Many people regard it only as a trap to enable the Post Office to charge excess fees on delivery. But if the Post Office Guide is at your elbow you will be able satisfactorily to circumvent the designing officials, and moreover you will find abundant opportunities in your daily correspondence to economise your expenditure by the use of this post. Circulars, printed visiting cards, Christmas, New Year, Easter and birthday cards may, it is generally known, be sent by the post, and a bit of writing is allowed. Now it is this "bit of writing" which is the problem both to officials and to the public. Mr. Henniker Heaton recently stated that there are only two persons in the Post Office who know what can and what cannot be sent by halfpenny post, and these two disagree. Five thousand persons, he tells us, were fined one penny each because their lodge treasurer wrote "With thanks" on his receipts; five thousand other innocent persons were similarly fined because the word "Gentleman" was affixed in writing to the concluding words of the circular. In another halfpenny post case we are told that twenty thousand recipients of a circular were fined one penny each for

the reason that a date was underlined in red pencil. I do not know what truth there is in these charges, but if correct, the Post Office certainly was obeying "the letter" of the regulations. It is a matter of opinion whether it would not have been better to carry out "the spirit" more generously. For the Guide tells us that there may appear in writing on the document, dates, hours and particulars of times, names, addresses, and description of parties, the place, character and objects of meetings or appointments. And there is a delightful permission for "formulas of courtesy or of a conventional character not exceeding five words, or initials." Some officials take this rule very seriously. They have bestowed as much ingenuity upon its interpretation as commentators have done on texts of Scripture. I have before me a report from a Superintendent on the question "whether 'With love' and similar expressions on Christmas cards might be regarded as forming a dedication."

"Upon inland cards it is considered that, bearing in mind how manifold are the forms that formulas of courtesy and of convention take, and that no definitions thereof have been framed, such words could reasonably be regarded as partaking of the nature of the above-described expressions. It is also the opinion that inasmuch as the terminology of dedications is subject only to the laws of decent expression, &c., the phrase may be taken as permissible in such addresses. The discussion of the point before has not come under note."

I think the complaint that "no definitions of formulas of courtesy have been framed" is a delightful touch, and the Superintendent is to be congratulated on a masterly statement of the situation. Paradoxes and epigrams are clearly disallowed at the low price of one halfpenny,

and on the whole we may fairly conclude that when an expression of love is priced as low as one halfpenny, and is in an unfastened envelope, it is purely conventional, and should not contravene either the letter or spirit of the regulations.

In the regulations for the Newspaper Post there is less opportunity for casuistry. You are bound down to one formula only if you must write something on the packet other than the address. You may write "With compliments," but any stronger form of expression will be charged as a letter. This is an excellent way of teaching people that there is a cash value to be put on even professions of friendship. Perhaps we may be allowed to notice in the minute regulations which are hedged round the halfpenny post the jealousy of the profit-making official of a postage which is not particularly remunerative. And a moment's consideration will show us that, if much latitude were allowed to the public in what they could write in a halfpenny packet, there would be a considerable reduction in the number of profitable penny letters. People who complain are really demanding halfpenny postage instead of penny postage for letters, and this of course could be secured to-morrow if the nation is prepared to pay an increased income-tax for the privilege. And if the nation will consent to charge the expense to imperial taxation there is no reason why we should not have free postage as well.

The Parcel Post regulations are set forth in great detail: there are so many things which evil-disposed persons would like to send us by post if they could get them accepted over the counter. Among such articles are explosive substances and live animals. Some may think the former term includes the latter:

it probably would inside a postal packet. The special permission of the Postmaster-General has to be obtained for the despatch knowingly of even a flea. A special exemption is made in the case of live bees, provided they are sent in suitable receptacles, and so packed as to avoid all risk of injury to the Postmaster-General. Wasps are not allowed even in suitable receptacles: the risk is evidently too great. Besides, there is no public demand for wasps.

Much advance has been made in recent years in the development of Express Delivery services. I do not think they are as well known as they ought to be: they are not "spoken of highly in the advertisements," only a simple statement of what you can do when in a hurry appears in the Post Office Guide. But the broad effect of the regulations is that with some increase in your expenditure you can have practically a private postal despatch and delivery service of your own. A special messenger will take a message or packet for you direct to any distance at the rate of 3d. a mile. Living animals, including dogs, may be sent by this means, also liquids. This is only one way in which you can be independent of the ordinary mail service. I suspect that many persons who have not a Postal Guide in their possession are ignorant of the fact that a letter weighing 4 oz. may be handed in at a passenger station for immediate transmission by railway. This is a convenience to many people who have lost the post and are near a railway station. Then you can use the telephone to speed up your mail service. You can telephone a letter to a post office, and it will be taken down in writing there and despatched by express delivery.

If you lose your train at a big railway station the

company will readily provide you with "a special" at a cost prohibitive to most men's purses. If, on the other hand, you lose the post, the Postmaster-General can at once provide you with "a special" also, but it will only be at a cost slightly in excess of the ordinary charge, and, unlike the case of the railway train, your post "special" will probably arrive before the ordinary mail.

There is one soul-stirring regulation for the Express Delivery services: it is hidden away in small print at the bottom of a page. What would not Selfridge's or Whiteley's make of such an announcement! "Postmasters may arrange for the conduct of a person to an address by an express messenger." "To see a man home" is a duty which can now be vicariously put on the Post Office.

But it is not my purpose to republish the provisions of the Guide in these pages: I want only to suggest to my readers that they may lose many opportunities to avail themselves of the various services through ignorance. For, as I have already hinted, the Postmaster-General is like "Bobs" in Rudyard Kipling's verses, "'E does not advertise," and many of the admirable things which he is prepared to do for the public remain practically undeveloped because of his modesty. How powerful would be the appeal to the public if he could follow the example of the Bedminster Down Penny Bank and advertise the Post Office Savings Bank with an effective poster such as the one on the opposite page.

To reach the heart of the people the appeal must be in the people's own idioms. There is nothing of this kind in the Postal Guide: you stumble across conveniences for the first time in its pages entirely

by accident—conveniences, perhaps, which you have only imagined in dreams and have perhaps thought of asking Mr. Henniker Heaton to advocate. And all the time they were in existence, buried in the pages of the Postal Guide.

But the man who delights in Bradshaw should find the most entertaining portion of the volume in the list of offices and time-tables. By itself this section is an admirable lesson in geography.

I have always found the list of the London streets showing their nearest post offices extremely useful.

YOU WON'T BE

NOT LIKE WHAT YOU
MIGHT CALL HAPPY NOT
TILL YOU'VE JOINED

THE BEDMINSTER DOWN PENNY BANK.

If I cannot locate the district in which the street is situated by its name alone, I am often able to do so when I know the name of its nearest post office. For instance, Holford Square, W.C.: where is it in the big Western Central District? The Guide tells me King's Cross Road is the nearest post office, and I know what part of London to make for at once.

The time-tables of the provincial mail services always interest me exceedingly. Part of the charm of writing a letter is to be able to realise the time when your friend will be reading it. You can of course usually do this if you send a letter by the

last post. You know then that as a rule he will be reading it at breakfast. But if your friend lives at Red Hill and you post your letter in London to him after breakfast, when will he get it? The Guide will enlighten you at once. He will be reading the letter between 3 and 4 P.M.

If your friend lives at Wick, in the very north of Scotland, when will he get the letter which you post to him in London, say on a Monday evening at 6 o'clock? Again you can fix the delivery of the letter within an hour at about 6 o'clock on the following evening. If he writes to you by return, and posts the letter the same evening at 11 o'clock, you will receive it by the first post on Thursday morning. Now if you went to the local post office with an inquiry on this subject, the official will only look at the Post Office Guide for the information which you could have obtained yourself without the trouble of a journey.

There are many people who think that the country post is fixed in London for everywhere at 6 o'clock, or at 5 o'clock in the suburbs. If they miss this they think that the first delivery in the morning has been lost. In numbers of instances this is the case, but the Guide will indicate to you plenty of places to which you can post late for the first delivery in the morning. For places as far north as Newcastle-on-Tyne and Manchester you can post up to 10.30 at the General Post Office to secure the first delivery.

Another advantage of these tables is that if you post a letter in London or the country on Saturday you will be able to find out whether or not there is a Sunday delivery in the place to which the letter is addressed. It is difficult to go wrong with these tables;

they are often more reliable than the information to be obtained at the local post office.

Outside a local post office, in the flowing handwriting of the postmaster, appeared this notice:—

NOTICE

HOURS OF COLLECTION

First collection: In Summer—
Morning at 5 o'clock.
" " In Winter—The night before
at nine o'clock.

Like Homer, the local post office often nods.

Sometimes the Head Office nods too. Years ago there used to be a poster which was displayed at every post office, headed "Advantages to Depositors," and these advantages were carefully numbered. They amounted to eighteen, neither more nor less. But the eighteenth was that "Additional information can be obtained of any local postmaster or by application free of cost at 144A Queen Victoria Street, E.C." This was not a very happy ending to one of the few efforts made by the Department to advertise its wares.

The sections devoted to Foreign and Colonial Mails will also interest the Bradshaw enthusiast. The Postal Union has had the effect of levelling the rates to something approaching to uniformity, but the varieties in distance remain. The Guide gives the approximate time for the journey of a letter, and we understand the method. Train and boat will take you to Paris now in something over eight hours. The Post Office, allowing for sorting, &c., at each end, will take your letter over the same distance and deliver it to the addressee in ten hours. Correspondence to Berlin takes 23 hours in

transmission, to St. Petersburg 61 hours, Constantinople 90 hours, and so on. You can ascertain from the Guide the route your letter will take, and you are clearly told what you must not send by letter post to certain countries. Australia will not accept opium, tobacco, or rabbit poison; China will not take cocaine, opium, and morphia; Denmark declines almanacs except those relating to literary subjects; Italy refuses all our patent medicines and articles of apparel, playing-cards, feathers, perfumes, "and other things." We should be very careful, considering the last phrase, what we send to Italy. New Zealand objects to cuttings of grape vines and printed editions of English copyright books and music; Persia jibs at "pictures of the human form and packets of pictorial postcards"; Roumania will not have religious pictures, photographs and reproductions of pictures from foreign history, soiled newspapers, or playing-cards; Russia objects to everything almost except a letter, especially printed matter. The Straits Settlements decline opium, morphia, morphine, cocaine, spirits, and bhang. This is the only country which declines bhang. Trinidad refuses "Rough on Rats" (poison): it is the first experience we have met of humanitarianism towards rats. Most countries object to coin, gold, silver, precious stones, and jewellery.

In the Foreign Parcel Post the objections are more detailed. For instance, you must not send to Belgium any game out of season, and arms and ammunition are refused by this and most other countries. Cuba dislikes naturally dead animals and insects, and Denmark objects to any potatoes which come from North America. The Falkland Islands put in a protest with which we shall sympathise against "shoddy and disused clothing": to receive it would obviously imply that

in the Islands you can wear anything. Greece wisely suspects sausages, and Persia declines all "articles offensive to good manners or to the Mussulman religion." Persia evidently wishes by her regulations to give the impression that she is highly sensitive to *comme il faut.*

Have I not made out my case, that the Post Office Guide is almost as interesting as Bradshaw? At any rate there is no doubt that, from the point of view of the long-suffering official, the British public are in need of a Postal Guide. I am quite sure that in the eyes of the average counter clerk the British public is the most over-rated institution in the country. There seems at times no limit to its wrongheadedness and obtuseness on postal matters.

There is, I am afraid, very often a great deal of truth in the charges that are often brought against postal counter clerks, especially female clerks, for incivility. I am not defending them—I have suffered myself; but a great deal too much is made of single instances, and I am convinced that in the vast majority of cases the charge does not apply. There are four classes of public servants who have my special sympathy: policemen, railway officials at big passenger stations, omnibus conductors, and Post Office counter clerks. They are all answering foolish questions the whole day long.

The editor of *Truth* once asked his readers, before desiring to air their grievances against the Post Office in his pages, to consider seriously whether the rule, regulation, or treatment of which they were complaining might not be justifiable. Regulations must exist in every business, and having made rules the Department must enforce them without discrimination. "It would be out of the question to give sorters or Post Office clerks a discretion to wink at some kinds of additions

to postcards and surcharge others. Whenever you make rules you create absurdities and hardships. It is absurd that if a letter weighs one ounce to the closest nicety you can send it for one penny, and that if you enclosed the hind leg of a flea in that same letter, the Post Office should insist on your paying an extra halfpenny—50 per cent. more—just for the hind leg of a flea. Granted that this is absurd, it would be still more absurd if there were no line drawn between the penny and the three-halfpenny rate. The Post Office stands badly in need of criticism, but let the criticism be reasonable." I think this is common sense, and people should not abuse the Post Office servants merely because they are obviously doing their duty. A lady wrote to the Postmaster-General in the following strain, and it is the type of hundreds of letters received by him: "I should like some other reply than the usual stereatippied reply which I undurstand is usual and I may say that I am writing under legal advice I shall probly put the matter wholly into Solicitorrs hands." Her intentions might have the desirable effect of improving her orthography, but the law is usually on the side of the Post Office, and the stereotyped reply is in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the only one possible in the circumstances. You can frighten your greengrocer probably by the threat of a solicitor's letter; it does not disturb the equanimity of his Majesty's Postmaster-General.

The moral is that there is no reason why anybody should resort to his solicitor for either partial or complete advice on postal matters, so long as a Post Office Guide is on the bookshelf. If the book says one thing and the postal servant says the other, then is the time for a complaint to the Postmaster-General, and not before.

The Post Office Guide

And if you do happen to bowl out that right honourable gentleman on a question of fact, you will have in nine cases out of ten a letter of regret from him, and possibly a word of thanks to you for having brought the matter under his notice.

As a private citizen I have been a student of the Post Office Guide during many years. I have watched with interest the great improvements and useful additions which have been from time to time introduced into the volume. But there are two desirable features I have always missed, and their absence still makes Bradshaw to me a more readable volume. I want a map of the world, showing in colour the countries which belong to the British Empire and those which are within the Postal Union. I want also a map of the United Kingdom showing at least all the head offices. And for the benefit of the large mass of the half-educated clients of the Post Office, who belong to all classes of society, I should like to see an appendix containing "A Complete Letter Writer," giving specimens of letters as they should be written to his Majesty's Postmaster-General.

CHAPTER XXIV

OLD AGE PENSIONS AND OTHER ACTIVITIES OF THE POST OFFICE

THE General Post Office undertakes several duties for the State that are not strictly proper to the Department, but which fall to its share because of the splendid machinery it possesses for getting into touch with the people. And when big reforms come along, such as Old Age Pensions or National Insurance, although the money is to come out of imperial funds, and is not brought into the Post Office balance-sheet at all, it seems the most natural thing for the Treasury to use as paymaster or receiving agent the Department which has an office in every village.

As regards Old Age Pensions I cannot do better than quote the Postmaster-General's own words in his report for 1909, the year following the adoption of the scheme.

"The Old Age Pension Act, 1908, provided for the payment of the pensions weekly, and your lordships having directed that the money should be paid through the Post Office, a committee composed of representatives of the Treasury, the Inland Revenue, the Local Government Board, and the Post Office drew up a scheme providing for payment by means of orders of a special pattern but resembling a postal order in general appearance.

"It gives me great satisfaction to report that the arrangements, which were necessarily planned at short notice, were carried out with complete success—a result

due, to a considerable extent, to the hearty and sympathetic co-operation of the postmasters and their staffs throughout the United Kingdom.

"The first payments took place on New Year's Day 1909, and during the three months ending the 31st March, 7,925,150 Old Age Pension orders were cashed, representing a total sum of £1,904,722.

"In addition to paying the pensions after they had been granted, the Post Office furnished (and continues to furnish) information and assistance to any person desiring to make an application for an Old Age Pension."

And again, in his report for 1910, the Postmaster-General referred to the matter:—

"The total number of Old Age Pensions paid during the year was 35,167,983, representing an amount of £8,465,231."

It will be seen from the size of these figures that the Post Office has taken upon itself a huge amount of extra business. The old people of the country have an additional reason for looking upon the Department as in a peculiar sense the friend of the poor. The weekly visit of the pensioners enables them to become known to the officials, and the pensioners in their turn grow attached to the building in which they experience weekly the joy of possession. There are few pleasanter human sights in the country to-day than to watch the faces of the pensioners as they leave the post office. Moreover, the meeting of the pensioners, all on the same errand, is having curious results. The Postmaster-General, in his wildest dreams of the possibilities of the Post Office, never perhaps saw it pictured as a matrimonial bureau in which Darby and Joan, going thither to receive their Old Age Pensions, would cast sheep's eyes at each other, and ultimately surround the dole of

the State with a halo of romance. In a village near Dudley, a few months after the introduction of Old Age Pensions, two old people were united in wedlock. The bridegroom had seventy-five years to his credit and the bride admitted to seventy-four summers. They had frequently met at the post office, grew to be friendly towards each other, and discovered perhaps a touch of romantic love in their hearts. Anyhow they decided to pool their pensions.

There have been many such instances. It is evident that many of the lady pensioners are now regarded, for the first time perhaps in their lives, as "catches," and I am afraid several have sacrificed the certain pension for the possible romance.

One of the most amusing incidents of the kind was brought to light over the payment of a Savings Bank warrant. The sub-postmaster was asked to satisfy himself as to the depositor's identity "in view of the shaky nature of her signature." The sub-postmaster replied: "I have paid the warrant. Depositor an old age pensioner, aged seventy-seven, well known at this office. The shakiness of signature was pointed out to her, and she explained that she was very excited that morning, having just put up the banns. Marriage at the Old Church. Ceremony will be on May 15th."

Of course there are abundant humours and tragedies revealed in the inquiries made at the post office by would-be pensioners. What desperate efforts will they not resort to for the purpose of proving their age qualification! An applicant at Monaghan, when asked for some evidence of age, replied, "I remember eating a fish which was blown out of Drumloo Lake the night of the big wind, 6th Jan. 1839."

And some persons seem to think that by the pay-

ment of the pension the Post Office is under an obligation to see that it is spent properly. A postmistress received this letter from the relative of a pensioner: "To the Postmaster. Dear Madam, you are requested by order to chastise J—— M—— of B—— for drinking his pension on Saturday, an also on a few occasions this month has been found drunk, an if you don't write to him and give him a sharp advice I shall proceed against you without further notice."

In consequence of the removal of the pauper disqualification on the 1st January 1911 the number of pensioners was greatly increased. A few can scarcely realise that they have not to go through some ceremony before they can be entitled. The lady pensioner perhaps feels what many of her sisters do when being married at a registry office: they miss the ceremony and the blessing of the Church. At one office in London an old lady inquired earnestly if she had to be christened. "Because," she said, "I've never been, and if I must I'd like to go to the Rev. —— for choice." And she looked woefully disappointed when she was informed that even in her unregenerate state she was qualified for a pension.

The General Post Office through its offices also supplies local taxation licences. If you seek to be the possessor of a dog, a gun, a male servant, a carriage, a motor bicycle, or a motor car, you will obtain the licence from the post office. There seems, indeed, no limit to the possibilities of the local office as an agent for the distribution of the good things which we expect in these days from reforming Governments.

. . . . . .

A very interesting but little-known branch of Post Office work is that connected with the army and navy.

In time of peace the army at home and abroad is served by the Post Office in the same way as the ordinary public. Correspondence posted in this country for the regiments stationed abroad is sent to and delivered through the agency of the civilian post offices of the colonies and dependencies. During great campaigns, however, it becomes necessary to organise special services to meet the needs of the larger bodies of troops engaged. The first occasion in modern times in which certain postal servants donned fighting kit and subjected themselves to military discipline in order to conduct the postal service in the field was in 1882, upon the outbreak of the Egyptian War. The men-sorters and telegraphists were enrolled from the 24th Middlesex Volunteers, a regiment composed entirely of Post Office servants, and by royal warrant they were constituted the Post Office Corps. The corps consisted of two officers and one hundred men specially transferred from the regiment to the Army Reserve for service abroad, and of these a detachment forty-four strong served with the expeditionary force in Egypt and conducted the entire postal service of the campaign.

The second reserve corps, consisting of telegraphists, and organised on similar lines to the Post Office Corps, was created within the regiment in 1884, under the name of the Royal Engineer Telegraph Reserve, to supplement the staff of the regular Royal Engineer telegraphists during the war. A detachment from this corps and one from the Post Office Corps served in the Sudan campaign of 1884–85.

In the South African War of 1899–1902 the Post Office Corps consisted of 648 men, and 453 men served in the Royal Engineer Reserve. The serious nature of their service is shown by the fact that the losses included

several killed in action and about fifty who died of disease.

The duties of the Army Post Office are, to put it briefly, to receive, sort, and distribute correspondence, and to sell stamps, stationery, and postal orders, and generally to perform the main functions of a post office as we know it at home.

The Army Post Office Corps, which is mobilised in time of war, is a volunteer organisation—that is to say, the men composing it are postal servants who volunteer for the particular service. The work of the Telegraph Battalion during the South African War was especially severe, and no less than 386 men were drawn from the Post Office for telegraph purposes alone.

In addition to acting as telegraphists with the army, the men were also required to mend the wires, which were constantly being cut by the enemy, and they were also expected to keep the wires in working order. Seventy-six skilled linesmen were sent out by the Post Office to look after this branch of the work.

Some idea of the postal work conducted by the Post Office Corps during the war may be gathered from the fact that in one week the number of letters sent from London for the seat of war was 313,416, and the mail from the Army Post Office, which reached London about the same time, contained 108,150 letters and registered articles. The parcels sent to the troops reached very high figures, amounting in one week to 19,019.

"The undelivered postal packet" of the Army Post Office is of course a large item in the day's work. It is pitiful to look at the contents of the bags returned. The envelopes are torn and dirty, some of the letters have lost their covering, thus making the delivery hope-

less, while others have written across them, "Killed in Action," "Missing," or "Gone Home."

Few people have any idea of the enormous area of South Africa which was covered by our military operations. By the time mails despatched from Capetown reached their destination the addressees had frequently changed their station, and the letters had to undergo a long course of re-direction.

Mr. H. C. Shelley, the war correspondent of the *Westminster Gazette*, bore eloquent testimony to the work of the Post Office during the war. "Both at Capetown and in the field I had many opportunities of watching the Army Post Office Corps at work. Officers and men alike were always alert in the discharge of their duties, and their courtesy was unfailing. No trouble was ever too great for them to take: their sole concern was that those longed-for letters from home might reach the expectant owners as quickly as possible. At Modder River the post office was a miserable room in which you could not have swung your arm, much less your arm and a cat, but in that wretched apartment the heroes of the Postal Corps kept cheerfully to their work with unflagging zeal."

As regards the navy, each ship of his Majesty's fleet has a post office to itself in charge of some duly appointed officer. Stamps and postal orders are on sale, and a special bag is provided on board for the posting of correspondence.

When the ships are in home waters the rates of postage to be prepaid are the same as those prevailing in the inland service of the United Kingdom, but in the cases of ships stationed abroad the postage home is ½d. for letters, 1d. each for postcards, and ½d. per 2 oz. for printed matter. As long as the corre-

spondence is posted on board the ships in the special bag provided for the purpose these rates apply, and British stamps are valid for the prepayment of the postage even though the ships may be in the harbour of a foreign country. The ship's bags are sealed and landed at the first convenient port, or transferred to the first likely ship that is met, for conveyance to destination. In the outward direction a special bag for each ship is made up in the General Post Office in London, and is despatched under seal at the first available opportunity.

. . . . . .

A book on the Post Office would not be complete without some reference to the boy messengers of the Department. They are certainly one of its activities. They have been called the aristocracy of the messenger world, for the State is in a position to pick and choose its servants. They are almost as well known to the public as the postmen.

No boy is accepted unless he has passed the seventh standard at school, and every candidate has to provide a satisfactory certificate of health from "his own medical attendant." A boy of fourteen must also be over 4 feet 8 inches in height. In London the boys usually start at 7s. a week, rising 1s. a week annually to 11s.

The Post Office messenger certainly receives an excellent training in good habits, and the discipline he undergoes is excellent for him. He is required to be alert and resourceful, though perhaps he does not have the same opportunities for varied experience as the district messenger boy. No doubt his training is useful also for outside employment if he leaves the Service at the end of his time, but

the boys' special qualifications are for Post Office service.

The boy messenger is especially interesting as a human type. He comes into a public office raw and untrained, and he usually leaves it a well-disciplined and decent-mannered man. If it unfortunately happens that discarded boy messengers frequently join the ranks of the unemployed, or even of the unemployable, it is difficult to believe that they can ever become hooligans. How is the boy licked into shape? First of all, in any large body of men or boys there is a recognised standard of conduct; even the boy who lives in the street is conscious of a standard of the street; but of course in a public office the standard is maintained also by rules and regulations. Perhaps we shall know these boys better, and besides obtain little glimpses into their lives, if I let them tell their own stories, by means of our old friend the written explanation.

The special feature of the boys' explanations is that there is nothing studied about their composition. As a rule, they are simple, direct, and unlaboured. They dispense with such trifles as punctuation, orthography, or syntax, but you feel when you are reading the documents that the boy is stating the facts as he knows them. It has been said that "it is better not to know too much than to know the things that ain't so," and we forgive the form of this sentence because of the way it grips with the situation: it closes with the truth; there is nothing to be said in opposition to it, but its form is the form of the half-educated. So it is with the literary efforts of the boy messenger: they are fresh, human, and free from artifice. "Are you free from any bodily injury

or defect?" was asked of a youthful applicant for a boy messengership. And he wrote down proudly, "Yes; I am in fine condition."

Here is a snipping from official papers. It is on the printed form used in all cases of the written explanation.

"Messenger G——: To furnish your explanation as to your conduct towards an old gentleman in —— Street this evening."

"THE POSTMASTER.

"SIR,—As I was passing through —— Street last night an old gentleman stood in the street. I threw a potato at the gentleman. I am very sorry, and I hope it will not occur again."

There is no beating about the bush here. As Mr. Birrell said of Dr. Newman: "That love of putting the case most strongly against himself is only one of the lovely characteristics of the man."

Another young hopeful had the misfortune to smash one of the office windows. An indignant Superintendent wanted to know the reason why. The lad made a clean breast of it. He filled in the departmental form giving all particulars, and he finished up with a fine piece of pleading. "I admit I threw the stone, but if the other boy had not ducked, the window would have been all right."

The boys are indeed often very smart in their replies. One was asked to explain "why you were seen walking across the sorting-room with an unlighted cigarette in your mouth." The answer was: "Because it is forbidden for me to light it in the office."

As an instance of the smart messenger boy, let

me tell a story. A young man, having missed a train at Victoria, despatched, with faint hope of its being delivered, a telegram to a young lady whom he should have met at East Croydon Station. The only possible address was of course "Miss X., waiting at East Croydon Station," and great was his surprise when he found the young lady awaiting him, as the telegram had directed, at Reigate. The young lady told him she was one of a great number of ladies who were on the platform, but the boy, on looking round them, came up to her at once with "A telegram for you, miss." Curious to know how he had detected the right addressee, she asked him the question, and he replied, "Because you looked so downhearted, miss."

A messenger who was exceedingly troublesome, and who had already received several cautions for his conduct, gave in this touching explanation: "After being cautioned several times about misconducting myself, I tried to turn over a new leaf, but whatever I do it seems that every one is down on me. I try very hard to behave myself but I find that I cannot do so." The truth must be told: his papers gave no indication of any new leaves.

A struggle between two boys in the sorting-room was explained in this way:—

"To the Postmaster: Messenger Smith called me a wooden head, so I poured hot tar over his dinner and punched him on the nose: hopeing this will meet with your approval."

It is to children unused to the arts of diplomacy that we have to look for plain statements of facts as they are: we elders grow astute by experience, and we hedge and prevaricate. The following bears all the evidence of a real happening:—

"Messenger Halter: You are requested to furnish at once your explanation as to the delay in the delivery of message No. 30. You were turned out at 11.20 and did not return until 11.37. Please state whether you stopped on the road before delivering the message."

"The Postmaster: I stopped and asked a boy if he had not only one handle on his barrow and he said no and I walked on again but the Gentleman saw me and asked me if I had a telegram for boston view and I said Yes and he said you silly fool Why did you Damweell stop and I said I was sorry and he said sorry by Dammed why did you stop with that boy you Dame fool I shall report you. You have made me lose the train."

The following is also no doubt a true picture:—

"Robert Brown, No. 28: You are requested at once to furnish your explanation as to excessive time taken to go to——"

"The Postmaster: When I got my message I went up High Street and through the market and delivered the message. When I was coming back, a horse which was in the park that I was walking along side of came over to me, so I stopped and patted it on the neck hoping it will never happen again."

We are all interested in the story of a fight, especially under unequal conditions, and here is a thrilling account of an encounter between two boys, written by themselves. We shall not fail to admire the splendid calm of the boy clerk who, though struck in the pit of the stomach, with the addition of several kicks on the shins, still remembered he was the superior officer, with the right to caution a subordinate.

"Boy Messenger: To explain fully the circumstances which led up to being molested by a boy clerk on the 6th inst."

"The Inspector: I was coming back from a wait case and I saw Messenger Jones through two cupboards and I called to him and the boy Clerk mentioned called me and gave me a wait case to take out and I told him that I did not know where to take it and he threw me outside. When I came back from the wait case he dragged me downstairs to the ground floor and kept hold of me while he was showing another boy clerk to get papers out. About ten minutes later he pushed me upstairs and bent my arms back and hurt my wrists at the time. He turned round on me all of a sudden and caught hold of my neck and pressed as hard as he could and wrung it. This happened on the First floor in the corridor.—E. C. P."

Now listen to the boy clerk's explanation. Note the superior tone of the boy in a higher position: it is a case of dignity and impudence.

"The Superintendent: Respecting the complaint made by the messenger P——, I wish to point out that any injury done to him by myself was done under circumstances which could with every justification be called self-defence.

"I was asked by Mr. Green to forward a case to the Ledger Branch, and when I asked P—— to go he after being absent from his bench for a considerable time gave me a blank refusal. I prevailed upon him to go after threatening more than once to report him. On arriving back he on each occasion when going past my desk passed sarcastic and insulting remarks, such as 'fool' and 'swanker.'

"Later he actually asked me to go down to the

basement and fight him though he is barely one-third my size, and for the second time threatened to blacken my eyes. He also deliberately gave me a blow in the pit of the stomach and several kicks upon the shins, *upon which I again cautioned him.* Taking no heed, he rushed at me with hands raised, and in the struggle which ensued he imagined he was badly hurt. Regretting having been in any way connected with this disturbance, I trust this explanation will be considered sufficient."

The italics are mine; we cannot fail to admire the way in which, in most trying circumstances, the boy clerk maintained his dignity.

The fighting instincts of the average boy are indeed the chief difficulties of his Superintendent. "I was coming out of sorting-room ground floor when Messenger B—— and I knock up against one another. So I tapped him on the head and he tapped me back and one thing brought on another and it ended wrestling."

A very pretty and reasonable story, which does not, however, prevent us forming a tolerably correct picture of the savage fight which actually took place.

Here are a few more explanations:—

"I had a pain in my leg which came on me all of a sudden, but I am sorry for this offence."

"We were all whistling at the time but we made no noise."

"I was watching an accident and had no idea what time it was, but I will watch that I stand and talk at no other accident."

Another in rather an aggrieved mood says: "If you knew what it is to take half-an-hour to eat half-a-slice of bread you would know what it was to have a gum-boil." We think we understand.

Yet another: "He was telling me a story and I called him a liar, only I used stronger language."

"I was taking a moonlight walk with my fiasco," was the explanation of one boy.

And one boy asks for a day's leave. "I beg to apply for a holiday to attend my grandfather's funeral. He died of senile decay."

Another boy's explanation of his delay in delivering a telegram was: "I went there and back as quick as I could and I will never let it occur again."

The Post Office has from the earliest times drawn upon the boy population of this country to do a large portion of its work. The postboys were carrying letters across country three hundred years ago, though in many cases the term "boy" was merely an official designation, and the individual was nearer his second than his first childhood. The labour is cheap—that of course is an advantage in the eyes of the Treasury—but there is also a peculiar fitness in the employment of the young in work which above all things demands quickness, alertness, and a capacity for endurance.

. . . . . .

We are approaching the end of our story, and it may not be out of place in this last chapter to say a few words concerning the Post Office as a whole, worked not by machinery but by human beings. Now what is called "the system" in human concerns influences more or less every individual. If you are a grocer "the system" is with you; the custom, the habit, and the public opinion of your trade will grow upon you, and your individuality and personal enterprise may in the end be crushed by "the system."

So it is in the Post Office; nearly all the irritation which the public exhibits occasionally towards the

Department is due to the fact that the official they have been dealing with is controlled by "the system." And the larger, the more powerful the body, the greater is the power of "the system" over the individual. The outward and visible sign of the domination of "the system" is "red tape," and it is found in the grocer's shop as well as in the Post Office.

A lady once wrote to the Controller of the Post Office Savings Bank this simple application: "Please send me a nomination form in the event of me dying in accordance with Rule No. 27." Now, strange as it may seem, there is a type of official mind which sees nothing ridiculous in her application. Long years of official routine, and the observance of minute regulations on every point of official conduct, have the effect of implanting in many minds so great a reverence for the regulations which govern their occupations that they view it as only natural that life and death should be subject to official rules. It is only a small minority in any condition of life who are not controlled by "the system." Why should we expect the minority to become a majority just because the persons involved possess Civil Service certificates?

Moreover, it is only a small minority anywhere who can be trusted to use their own judgment always or to work "the system" in the light of their own intelligence, and I venture to say that in the imperfect condition of the human race what is called "red tape" means security for the public. It is better to suffer from some hardship, owing to the personal application of a regulation framed not to meet one individual instance but an average of cases, than to run the risk of your official business being conducted by a man whose guiding star is supposed to be common sense alone,

but whose own particular illumination is probably a mere twinkle, scarcely seen by the naked eye.

There is a delightful official phrase which is frequently addressed to complainants, and it runs something like this: "The regulation, which is framed under Act of Parliament, has been drawn up as much in the interests of the public as to safeguard the Department." Both the public and the Department need to be protected from the capriciousness of the average official—who is also, it may be noted, the average man.

I remarked in a previous chapter that the British Government had a way of contracting itself out of its own laws, and the Postmaster-General often reserves to himself the right to contract himself out of his regulations. The phrase, "the discretion of the Postmaster-General," is brought into play in cases of hardship, and it is through this loophole that the rigour of "the system" may become modified.

Now, roughly speaking, the discretion of the Postmaster-General can only be exercised in the General Post Office by officials who are in receipt of at least £500 a year, and the flexibility of "the system" depends, therefore, upon the personnel of a small group of men in each department. The rank and file carry out the regulations; certain members of the public consider that in their particular cases the regulations are unjust or inapplicable; they appeal to headquarters, and here it is where the discretionary powers of the Postmaster-General are exercised. I do not say this is a perfect arrangement: the man at headquarters, owing to his training under "the system," is often afraid himself to use the discretion to which he is entitled, and he too falls back upon the rigidity of the regulations. But it works admirably when the official

is equal to his responsibilities, and when the complainant has a legitimate grievance against the Department.

Many grievances against a public office arise, I am convinced, not out of the thing done or undone, but on account of the way complainants are sometimes approached. It is the officialism of the average official man which we dislike. A certain clergyman was once summoned to the presence of his bishop, a dignitary who was known throughout his diocese for his want of urbanity, and on leaving the august presence he was asked by a sympathising brother how he had fared. The clergyman simply threw up his hands despairingly and said: "He casteth forth his ice like morsels: who is able to abide his frost?"

There are too many officials in the public service who resemble this bishop: the influence of "the system" on their official characters has been to develop in them a sort of consciousness of caste. But I have written this story of the Post Office in vain if I have not brought out clearly the human side of the Department, and if I have not shown that, although it is in appearance and working a huge machine, yet the human factor counts in the highest as well as the lowest duties of the Service. And I hope I have proved my case that the Post Office is a live institution and adapts itself readily to the needs of the British people.

INDEX

ABBOT'S Cliff, 191
Aberdeen, 72, 73, 80
Accountant-General, 45, 55
Addresses on letters, 108, 111, 115, 120, 252
Admiralty, 220
Advertising postal facilities, 85, 323
Aldersgate Street, 129
Allen, Ralph, 36
Alphabet keeper, 45
America, 64
Anglo-American Telegraph Company, 160
Animals by post, 323
Annals of the Road, 27
Annuities, Post Office, 143
Architecture of Post Offices, 233, 302
Army Post Office—
  Crimea, 130
  Early history, 336
  Duties of, 337
Arran Islands, 217
Assistant Secretaries, 261
Associations, their recognition by Postmaster-General, 262
Atlantic Ferry, 209, 212
Athens, 81
Australia—
  First mail service to, 215
  Postal service, 258
  Articles refused by post, 328
Austria, 160
Awards Committee, 206
Aylesbury Coach Road, 89

BAGNIGGE Wells, 85
Baines, F. E., C.B., 32, 265
Balloons, 235
Balmoral Castle, 216
Band conveyors, 60
Baptism, commercial idea of, 150
Barnet, 98
Bartholomew's Hospital, 58
Batavia, 213
Bath, 22, 36
Baudot system—
  Introduction, 155
  Circuit, 160
  Working of, 167
Bawtry, 281
Bedminster Town Penny Bank, 325
Bees by post, 323
Belfast, 279
Belgium—
  Parcel Post to, 84
  Money Orders to, 131
  Wires to, 160
  Telephone to, 191
Bell, A. M., 182
Bell, Graham, 182
Berlin, 327
Berne—
  First Congress, 225
  Treaty of, 226
  Second Congress, 228
  Monument, 230
Bicycles, 99
Birmingham, 31, 35, 70, 72, 164, 279
Blackfriars Power Station, 162, 169
"Black Swan," 44
Blackwood, Sir Arthur, K.C.B., 264
Blind Section, 62, 89, 90
Bombay, 215, 216
Bousseul, Charles, 181
Boxmoor, 72
Boy messengers—
  Qualifications, 339
  Explanations, 341–346
Bradshaw, 231
Bright's Bell, 155
Brighton, 75, 99, 100
Brindisi, 215
Brisbane, 216
Bristol, 21, 279, 280
Britannia, 213
British Central Africa—
  Postal Service, 255
British Central Africa—
  Postmaster's duties, 257
British Islands packet services, 217
British Post Offices abroad, 205
Brontë, Charlotte, 67
Brussels, 191
"Bull and Mouth," 27, 50
Bullion, carriage of, 209
Burdett, Sir Francis, 34
Burravoe, 81
Buxton, Right Hon. Sydney, M.P., 201, 262

CABLE conveyors, 60
Cadiz, 81
Cairo, 215
Calais, 220
Caledonian Railway, 73
Camels as carriers of mails, 246, 254
Campania, 213
Campbell, Lord, 23
Campbeltown, 285
Canada—
  Parcel Post, 84
  Money Orders, 131
  Imperial Penny Post, 258
Canary Islands, 237
Cape Colony—
  Money Orders, 131
  Ocean mail service, 214, 216
  Post Office stones, 255
Cape Grisnez, 191
Card system for accounts, 244
Cardiff, 279
Carlisle, 75
Cash on Delivery System, 253
Cats in Post Office, 95
Central News Agency, 165
Central Telegraph Office—
  Building, 67
  Transmitting centre, 159
  First office, 161

Index

Central Telegraph Office—
  Interior, 163
  Sunday arrangements, 169
  Staff, 173
Chamberlain, Right Hon. Joseph, M.P., 51, 247, 263
Channel Fleet, letters to, 116
Channel Islands—
  Cable to, 156
  Mail service, 218
Chesham, 104
China—
  Mails to, 220
  Post Office, 244
  Articles refused, 328
Christian World, 298
Christ's Hospital, 58
Civil Service, secret of success in, 272
Clerical Establishment, 268
Clerks of the Roads, 45, 125
Clifden, 178
Cloak Lane, 43
Coaches, 22
Coaching inns, 98
Coin by post, 125, 127
Coke, Lady Mary, 304
Coldbath Fields Prison, 85
Coleridge, S. T., 33
Colonial Office, 51
Compensation, 59
Comptroller and Accountant-General, 265
Concentrator switches, 168
Connaught, 218
Consols—
  Popularisation of, 140
  Amount held in Post Office, 141
  Facilities for purchase, 141
  Reduction of interest on, 143
Constantinople, 84, 130, 328
Continental Mail, 75, 222
Cooke, 155
Cornwall, 75
Cowper, William, 21
"Creed" system, 155, 166
Crimean War, 130
Cuba, 328
Cunard Company, 212

Daily Mail, 108, 193
Daily Telegraph, 245
Date stamping, 61
David Copperfield, 281
Dead Letter Office, 109, 118
Deal, 33
Denmark, 328
De Quincey, Thomas, 28, 102
De Saint Marceaux, 230
Diamond Jubilee Reforms, 84, 246, 258
Dickens, Charles, 28
Dickson, Mrs. Elizabeth, 314
Dieppe, 220
Dockree support system, 88
Dockwra, 35, 290
Don Manuel Alvarez Espriella, 210
Dover, 220
Dover Road, 19, 208
Dryden, 45
Dublin, 218
Duncan, Rev. Henry, 138
Dunfermline, 287

EASTBOURNE, 284
East India Company, 247
Edinburgh, 23, 32, 36
Edinburgh Castle, 216
Edison Telephone Company, 183, 184
Egypt, 84, 215, 336
Electric stamping machines, 61
Electric Telegraph Company, 161
Elephant as carrier of mails, 246, 249
Engineer-in-Chief, 267
Engineers, 195, 196
Enniskillen, 284
Etruria, 213
Euston, 72, 74, 80, 89
Exchange Telegraph Company, 165
Exeter, 25
Express Delivery Service, 96, 323

FACTORIES (*see* Post Office Factories)
Fair Isle, 220
Fair Wages Resolution, 206
Falkland Islands, 328
Falmouth—
  As packet station, 209
  100 years ago, 210
  P. and O. service, 214
Farmers' telephones, 193
Fawcett, Right Hon. H., 85, 262
Ferry mail services, 81
Fiji Islands, 216
Fishguard, 217
"Fleece Tavern," 44
Flushing, 75, 220
Flying Coaches, 22
Folkestone, 75, 220
Foot posts, 21
Foreign Parcel Post, articles refused, 328
Foreign postal rates, 223
Foreign Post Office methods, 231
Forman, H. Buxton, C.B., 265
Forty Years at Post Office, 265
Foula, 220
Founder's Court, E.C., 161
France—
  Money Orders to, 131
  Wires to, 160
  Postal methods, 234
  Savings Bank, 235
  Telegraphs, 236
  Parcel Post, 236
Franks, 34
Freeling, Sir Francis, 264, 268, 278

GARIBALDI, 41
Gavey, Sir John, K.C.B., 267
Gell System, 166
General Election—
  Effects on telegraph system, 171, 204
General Post Office North, 55, 67
General Post Office South, 55, 67
General Post Office West, 67, 161
Germany—
  Parcel Post, 84
  Money Orders, 131
  Wires to, 160
  Postal methods, 232
  Post Offices, 232
Ghosts seen from motors, 107
Gibraltar, 81, 84, 214
Gladstone, Right Hon. W. E.—
  Anglican Orders, 132
  Post Office Savings Bank, 138
  Home Rule Bill telegrams, 171

Index

Glasgow—
Early charges to, 32
Telephone, 191
Postmaster, 279
Postmen, 313
Grand Magazine, 270
Great Eastern Railway, 75
Great North Road, 22, 32, 98, 282
Great Western, 212
Great Western Railway, 73, 75
Greenwich Observatory, 170
Grievances against the Post Office, 330

HALFPENNY POST, 64, 320
Harkara, 249, 250
Haroldswick, 80, 81
Harwich, 209, 220
Hasker, Thomas, 24, 27, 30
Heaton, Henniker, 247, 320, 325
Hennibique reinforced concrete, 58
Hill, Sir Rowland, K.C.B.—
Penny Postage, 31
As a reformer, 35
Career, 38
His reforms, 39
As a lecturer, 54
Hindhead, 199
Hindustan, 214
Hobart, 216
Holborn Viaduct, 75
Holland, 160
Holyhead, 24, 29, 217
Home Safes—
England, 154
New Zealand, 259
Hong Kong, 84, 244
Hood, Thomas, 40
Household Words, 136
Hughes recorder, 155, 160
Hull, 279
Hungary, 160

IMPERIAL PENNY POSTAGE—
Beginnings of, 247
Esfablishment of, 258
Incivility of officials—
Germany, 233
America, 241
England, 329
India—
Wires to, 160
Mails, 214
India—
Early postal service, 247
Honours, 251
Indo-European Telegraph Company, 160
Insurance, National, 279, 332
Insurance, Post Office, 143
Intercommunication switch, 163, 168
International Parcel Post, 83
Investments in Government Stock, 140
Ipswich, 25, 75
Ireland—
Mail coach service, 29
Parcel Post, 94
Packet service, 217
Service incident, 295
Iris, 215
Isle of Man, 217, 218
Isle of Skye, 217
Isle of Wight, 217

JACOBS, W. W., 274
Japan—
Mails to, 220
P.O. service, 243
Savings Banks, 244
Jingle, Mr. Alfred, on postmen's uniform, 311
Johnston, Sir H. H., K.C.B., 255
Johnston, R. W., 50
Jolly, John, 107
Joyce, H., C.B., 265

KARSTADT, FREDERICK, 70
Kekewich, Sir George, 270
Kipling, Rudyard, 250, 324
King Edward's Building—
Migration of staff to, 55
Site, 57
Construction, 58
Ventilation, 66
Staff, 67
King's Birthday—
Coach processions, 27
Post Office feast, 46
King's posts, 20, 208, 277
Kingston-on-Thames, 100
Knoydart, 220

LAMB, CHARLES, 216
Leamington, 305
Leeds, 32, 279
Leinster, 218
Lerwick, 80, 220
Letter bringers, 45
Letters, number of, 64
Lichfield, Lord, 36
Lighthouse communication, 178
Limited mail, 73
Lincoln sorting carriage, 75
Lisbon—
Early mail service, 214
Postal congress, 228
Lismore, 295
Listowel, 172
Liverpool, 35, 57, 70, 97, 213, 279
Liverpool Street, 75
Loading coils, 191
Local Taxation Licences, 335
Lombard Street, 45, 48, 55
London—
Early posts, 19
Mail coaches, 27
Twopenny posts, 35
First Post Office, 43
Postmaster of, 56
Chief Post Office, 57
London and North-Western Railway, 31, 73, 74
London and South-Western Railway, 75
London Bridge, 75
London Postal Service, 56
Lucania, 213
Lusitania, 213

MABERLEY, Colonel, 50
Macadam, 27
Macdonald, Flora, 285
Madeira, 81, 216
Magazine competitions and postal orders, 133
Magazine Post, 238
Magnetic clocks, 170, 200
Mail bags—
Makers of, 45
Colour, 62
Travelling Post Office, 77
Repairs, 203
Mail cart, 80
Mail coaches—
Early days, 23
Speed, 24
Robberies, 27
Procession, 27
End of, 29
Coach *v.* motor, 104
Mail coachmen—
Uniform, 24
Furious driving, 26
Stories of, 104, 107

Index

Mail guards—
  Arming of, 24, 103
  Condition of service, 25
  Complaints against, 26
Mail trains—
  First trains, 32
  Late-fee boxes, 73
  Night, 74, 75
  Catching up, 302
Majestic, 213
Mallaig, 220
Malta, 84
Manchester, 35, 279, 326
Manila, 216
Manning, Thomas, 216
Marconi Company, 178
Marriage, depositors' views on, 150
Masters of the Posts, 143
Mauretania, 81, 208, 213
Melbourne, Lord, 37
Middleton, 92
Midland Travelling Post Office, 75
Milford, 217
Milton, John, 45
Mirror, 308
Money Orders—
  Reduction in price, 39
  Offices, 55, 68
  Early days, 125
  Old charges, 126
  Number issued, 127
  Soldiers and sailors, 130
  Foreign and Colonial, 131
  Telegraph, 132
  Complaints, 134
  Scenes at counter, 136
Monte Video Times, 243
Montreal, 123
Morris, O'Connor, 53
Morse characters, 165
Morse's Printer and Sounder, 155
Mossbank, 81
Motor mails—
  Early beginnings, 100
  Distances, 102
  Night service, 102
  Guards, 103
  Drivers, 103, 105
Mount Pleasant, 61, 67, 85
Mowatt, Sir Francis, K.C.B., 271
Muckle Flugga, 79
Mulock, Hon. William, K.C., 258
Munster, 218
Murray Multiplex, 155

NATIONAL Insurance, 279, 332
National Telephone Company, 177, 185, 187
National Telewriter Company, 177
Navy Post Office, 338
Newcastle-on-Tyne, 279, 326
Newhaven, 220
New Jersey, 285
Newmarket, 35
Newspaper post, 29, 64, 322
Newport, 92
Newton, 92
New South Wales, 260
New York—
  Telephone service, 189
  Mail service to, 213
New Zealand—
  Postal service, 258
  Pigeon post, 260
  Articles refused, 328
Nightingale, Florence, 130
Northcote, Sir Stafford, 130
Norway, A. H., 209, 210
Norwich, 35, 75
Nottingham, 279

OLD AGE PENSIONS—
  In New Zealand, 259
  In England, 332
  Number, 333
  Stories of, 334
On the Track of the Mail Coach, 265
Oporto, 214
Orient Company, 216
Orkney, 80, 217
Osiris, 215
Overland Route, 214
Oversea Mails—
  Times of voyages, 216

PACKET Services (*see* Post Office Packet Service)
Paddington, 75
Pages from a Private Diary, 299
Palmer, John, 22, 99, 102
Parcel Post—
  Offices, 55, 67
  Beginnings, 83
  Rates, 84
Parcel Post—
  Foreign, 84, 328
  Sorting, 86, 88
  Receptacles, 89
  Packing, 93
  Switzerland, 232
  France, 236
Parcel Post coaches, 99, 101
Paris—
  Telephone, 191
  Postal Congress, 228
  Postal service, 235
Paris Messenger, 240
Parsons, Alfred, R.A., 274
Payment on demand, 142
Pearson's Weekly, 133
Peel, Sir Robert, 291
Peninsular and Oriental Company, 214
Penny Post—
  Demand for, 32
  Introduction, 37
  Results, 40
  Dockwra's, 290
Penzance, 73
Permanent officials, 270, 349
Persia, 85, 328
Philadelphia Exhibition, 182
Phonogram, 163
Pigeon Post—
  French, 235
  New Zealand, 260
Pillar boxes, 112, 113
Pitt, William, 23
Plague, Great, 44
Pneumatic tubes, 161, 163, 203
Port Said, 215
Postal charges—
  Old style, 32
  Evasion of, 33
  Prepayment of, 37
Postal Orders—
  Offices, 68
  Origin, 132
  Numbers, 132
  Effect of newspaper competitions on, 133
  Lost, 135
  Regulations, 322
  Foreign, 328
Postal Union—
  First Conference, 224
  Opposition to, 225
  Business, 227
  Conferences, 228

Index

Postal Union—
  Monument, 230
  Uniformity of services, 327
Postboys, 20, 46, 346
Postcards—
  Number, 64
  Addresses, 114
  Prices, 320
Post horses, 20, 104, 277
Postman's bell, 304
Postman's Federation, 309
Postman's Gazette, 313
Postman's knock, 315
Postmaster—
  Early history, 20, 277
  News agents, 277
  Duties, 278
  Salaries, 279
  Powers, 282
  Letters to, 283–287
  Inquiry agents, 288
Postmaster-General—
  Early conditions, 45
  Duties of office, 261
  Discretionary powers, 348
Postmaster-General's monopoly, 19, 184
Postmen—
  Before Penny Postage, 34
  Empire, 246
  Early condition, 302
  Grades, 305
  Duties, 306
  Uniform, 311
  Lame, 315
Post Office clerks—
  Promotion, 269
  Advantages, 273
  Esprit de corps, 275
  Counter, 329
Post Office factories, 202
Post Office figures—
  Their size, 63
  Balance-sheet, 266
Post Office Guide—
  Its scope, 318
  Usefulness, 320, 325
  Time-tables, 325
  Defects, 331
Post Office Library, 54
Post Office Packet Service—
  Early history, 209
  Sailors' pensions, 211
  Home Service, 217
Post Office Savings Bank—
  Sir Rowland Hill on, 39
  Offices, 55, 68
Post Office Savings Bank—
  Origin, 138
  Number of depositors, 139
  Stock investments, 140
  Withdrawals, 142
  Cost of transactions, 143
  Government security, 144
  Cheque deposits, 144
  Staff, 145
  Colonial transfers, 154
  Home safes, 154
  Withdrawal telegrams, 163
  Stories of depositors, 146–153
Post Office song, 46
Post Office stone, 255
Post Office uniform, 201, 250, 254
Posts—
  Origin of word, 19
  Masters of, 20, 143
Postwomen, 313
Preece, Sir William, K.C.B., F.R.S., 179, 183, 267
Press telegrams, 158, 189
Preston, 72
Primrose, Sir Henry, 271
Punch, 193, 319
Punctuality, 51
Puzzle addresses, 63

Quarterly Review, 26
Queen Victoria Street, 67, 327

RACE MEETINGS—
  Telegraph arrangements, 166, 176
Radio telegrams, 178
Raikes, Right Hon. Cecil, 262
Railways—
  Introduction, 29
  Travelling by night, 32
  Modern conditions, 71
  Parcel carriers, 96, 99
Rat-catcher, 46
Rats in Parcels Office, 95
Reading, 75
Red Hill, 101
Red tape—
  Supplies, 202
  Methods, 347
Registered packets, 112
Reply coupon, 228
Returned Letter Office, 108
Returned Parcels Office, 94
Roads—
  Early conditions, 19
  Improvements in, 27
  Neglect of, 98
  Motor service, 103
Rome, 228
Rosebery, Lord, 275
Roman remains, 48, 57
Roumania, 328
Royal William, 212
Runners—
  Early use of word, 19
  Indian, 249
  South African, 254
  Central African, 256
Rural Posts—
  France, 234
  America, 241
  Early history, 290
  Later history, 291
Russell's Wagons, 209
Russia, 160, 204, 328
Ruthwell, 137

SAILING VESSELS—
  As mail packets, 208
  Construction, 211
  Contracts with, 220
Sanctuary, privilege of, 48
St. Kilda, 218
St. Martin's le Grand—
  College of, 48
  Design of building, 49
  Interior, 50
  Chief office, 56
  Officials, 54
  Closing of, 55
St. Petersburg, 328
Samuel, Right Hon. Herbert, 266
Savannah, 212
Savings Banks, 137, 150 (*see* Post Office Savings Banks)
Scalloway, 80
Scavenger, Post Office, 46
Schooling, J. H., 64
Scilly, 156, 217
Scotland—
  Early postal service, 19
  Footposts, 21
  Postal charges to, 32
  Mails to, 407
Scott, Sir Walter, 29
"Scottish Coast Village," 298
Scudamore, Frank Ives, C.B., 54, 265

Index

Selby, 32
Servia, 213
Shanghai, 215
Sheffield, 279
Shelley, H. C., 338
Shetland Isles, 39, 79, 116, 156, 217, 219
Shrewsbury, 79
Sikes, Sir C. W., 138
Skye, 217
Smirke, Mr., 49, 55
"Snooper in," 190
Solicitor to Post Office, 267
Sorting carriages, 73, 74
Sorting of letters and parcels, 60, 61, 88
South Africa, 253
South America, 243
Southampton, 218
South-Eastern and Chatham Railway, 75, 302
Southsea, 286
Spain—
  Leisured methods, 211
  Postal service, 236
Spanish swindle, 114
Special Events Section, 166
Steam motors, 101
Stephen, Justice, 185
Stephenson, George, 31
Stock certificates, 140
Stock Exchange, 173
Stores Department—
  Early beginnings, 45
  Offices, 68
  Business, 200
  Sale of stores, 205
Stow's Survey, 43
Straits Settlements, 84, 245, 328
Studd Street, 68
Submarine cables, 156, 160, 191
Sub-Postmaster—
  Qualifications, 289
  Increase of duties, 292
  Troubles, 294
  Hereditary, 295
  Applications for, 300
Sub-Postmistress—
  Qualifications, 296
  Methods, 297
  Difficulties with, 302
Suez—
  Mail route, 214
  Canal, 215
Sunday deliveries, 326
Surveyors, 267
"Swan with Two Necks," 27
Switzerland—
  Money Orders, 131
  Postal facilities, 232

TAMWORTH, 75
Tangiers, 81
Taplow, 104
Telegraph Act (1869), 184
Telegraphs—
  Offices, 56, 67
  Early history, 155
  Transfer to State, 156
  Charges, 158
  Breakdown, 159
  News Section, 165
  Special Section, 166
  Long distance, 167
  Timing of, 170
  Loss on, 189
Telegraph Construction Act (1908), 199
Telegraph instruments, 160, 204
Telegraph poles, 198, 203, 204
Telegraph Street, E.C., 161
Telegraphists—
  Scales of pay, 173
  In war, 336
Telephone Company, 183
Telephones—
  Effect on telegraph, 176
  Early beginnings, 181
  Parliament's action, 185
  London service, 186
  Decision to purchase, 187
  Subscribers, 188
  United States, 189
  Long distance calls, 190, 193
  Exchange, 191
  Farmers, 193
Telephone-telegram business, 163
Telewriter, 177
Telford, 27
Teutonic, 213
Thomson, Sir William, 183
Threadneedle Street, E.C., 173
Tie-on labels, 94
Tilley, Sir John, K.C.B., 264
Tintagel, 301
Tranavoe, 81, 255
Travelling Post Office—
  Romance, 69
  First service, 71
  Apparatus, 75
  Disasters, 79
  Mail bags, 203
  Oversea mails, 213
Treasury, 264
Trinidad, 328
Trollope, Anthony, 41, 52 53, 267
Trouble-man, 190
Truth, 329
Tuke, Brian, 19
Tunbridge Wells, 22

Ulster, 218
Umbria, 213
Undelivered packets—
  Numbers, 110
  Stories of, 113-123
  South African War, 337
Underground wires, 178, 187, 190, 196, 199, 233
Uniform (*see* Post Office Uniform)
Union Castle Line, 216
Union Postale, 227
United States—
  Letters to, 64
  Money Orders, 131
  Telephone service, 189
  Weather, 190
  Postal Union, 224
  Postal service, 238
  Postmaster-General's reports, 241

"VALEURS à recouvrer," 236
Value-Payable Post, 253
Vienna, 228
Vigo, 214
Village Post Office—
  Described, 298
  Architecture, 300
Villette, 67
Viner, Sir Robert, 45
Voe, 81
Von Stephan, Herr, 224, 226, 232

WAGHORN, Lieutenant, 214
Walpole, Sir Spencer, K.C.B., 229, 265, 271
Washington, 228
Washington Evening Star, 228
Wayleave-getting, 197

Index

Welby, Lord, 270
West, Sir Algernon, K.C.B., 270
West Indies, 84, 131
West Kensington, 68, 144
Weston-super-Mare, 287
Weymouth, 218
Wheatstone, Sir Charles, 182
Wheatstone apparatus—
A B C, 155
Automatic, 155, 165
Transmitter, 165
Telephone, 181
White Star Line, 213
Wick, 326
Windowman, 45
Wireless telegraphy, 178
Witherings, 35
Wolverton, Lord, 147
Women clerks—
Savings Bank, 145
Conditions of service, 2
Wort, Mrs. Jane, 314
Written explanation, 310

YARMOUTH, 209
Yates, Edmund, 53
Yell Sound, 81
York, 24, 27
YQ wire, 166

Printed by BALLANTYNE, HANSON & Co.
Edinburgh & London


00099131

Digitized with financial assistance from
Shri Brihad Bhartiya Samaj
on 20 February, 2020